the weekly Standard

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OUR LONG OBAMACARE NIGHTMARE (CONT.)
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HOPE AND CHANGE IN IRAQ

BY REUEL MARC GERECHT

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Racism in the Islamic World

How can peace prevail in the Middle East in the face of Islamic bigotry and hate? When will moderate Muslims speak out?

For years, the U.N., led by Islamic and Arab nations and their sympathizers, has accused Israel of racism and "apartheid." That is nonsense, of course. But the world consistently turns a blind eye to open, seething anti-Semitism in Islamic society.

What are the facts?

In one of the most astonishing propaganda coups ever, a United Nations conference on racism, which took place in Durban South Africa, declared that Zionism is racism. No wonder the U.S. and Israel walked out of the meeting, which was dominated by representatives of Islamic and Arab states and other anti-Israel forces, and whose conclusions were predictable from the outset.

The supreme irony of this conference was that it accused no other nation of racism—only Israel. In truth, Israel is perhaps the most racially and ethnically diverse and tolerant country in the world. More than half of Israel's Jewish population consists of people of color—blacks from Ethiopia and Yemen, as well as brown-skinned people from Morocco, Iran, Syria, Egypt and Israel itself. In addition, Israel's population includes more than one million Arabs, who enjoy the same civil rights as Jewish Israelis. In Israel hate speech is banned, and it is against the law to discriminate based on race or religion.

> "Until Muslims reject racism in all forms, they can't expect Islam to enjoy full respect as a political and spiritual force."

In contrast, anti-Semitism—a poisonous form of racism directed specifically against the Jewish people—is rampant in most all Islamic societies. Not only is anti-Semitism commonplace in Muslim nations, but it is propagated shamelessly by their leaders, in state-sponsored media, and by Muslim clergy.

For example, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed declared in a speech to the Organization of Islamic Conference that, "today Jews rule the world by proxy. They get others to fight and die for them." Imagine if an American president had made a similarly sweeping and bigoted statement about blacks, Latinos or any other race—what a justifiable uproar, perhaps even an impeachment, would ensue. Yet there was no condemnation by the Muslim world of Mr. Mohamed's comments. Rather, virtually all of the conference's Muslim leaders actually voiced their approval.

In response to a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia in May 2004, Crown Prince Abdullah declared that "Zionism is behind [these] terrorist actions in the kingdom." (Zionism is the code word often used by Islamic anti-Semites for Jews.) Tom Lantos, the late U.S. Congressman, called the Prince's assertion "an outrage . . . blatant hypocrisy," but Islamic leaders were silent. In fact, millions of Muslims still insist that Zionists were behind the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

Anti-Semitism is expressed so freely and ubiquitously in most Islamic societies that no citizen can escape it. During Ramadan a few years ago, Egypt's state-controlled TV aired "Horseman Without a Horse," a program based on the notorious forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, in which Jews allegedly use the blood of non-Jews to make Passover matzot. In Iran, a TV series, "Zahra's Blue Eyes," portrays "Zionists" kidnapping Palestinian children and harvesting their organs.

Perhaps nowhere is the hatred of Jews more virulent than among the Palestinians. Most perniciously, Palestinian children are taught in school that Jews are descended from apes and pigs and that the most noble thing they can do is to kill Jews. Muslim clerics like Imam Ibrahim Madiras, an employee of the Palestinian Authority, declared in a television sermon, "Jews are a cancer" and later that, "Muslims will kill the Jews . . . [and] rejoice in Allah's victory." No surprise, then, that the 1982 doctoral dissertation of Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas makes the astounding claim that "Zionists" collaborated with the Nazis to annihilate the Jewish people in order to drive the survivors to Palestine.

Anti-Semitism and the prospects for peace. Islamic anti-Semitism permeates the Arab Middle East and creates an atmosphere in which Jews are reviled and represented as subhuman. How can the Palestinian people embrace peace with a people represented by their religious and political leaders as dehumanized, evil beings? Even more importantly, how can Israel be expected to trust a so-called peace partner who expresses abject hatred and murderous intent toward Jews on a daily basis? Yet the U.S. and many European nations continue to demand that Israel make one-sided sacrifices for peace with a people steeped in racism and committed to its destruction.

Until Islamic leaders muster the integrity to relentlessly condemn anti-Semitism (and its evil twin, anti-Zionism), we can't expect Israel to accept a forced peace with the Palestinians. Likewise, until moderate Muslims reject racism in all forms, they can't expect Islam to enjoy full respect as a political and spiritual force among the world's people.

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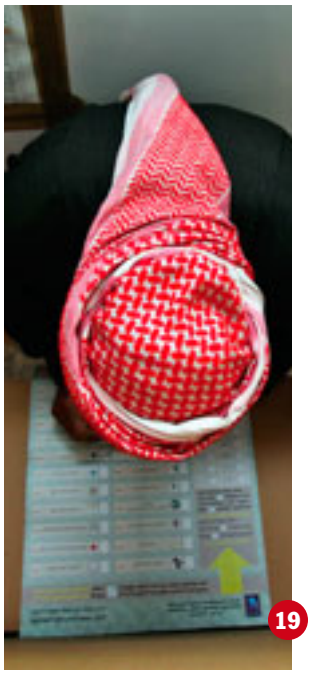

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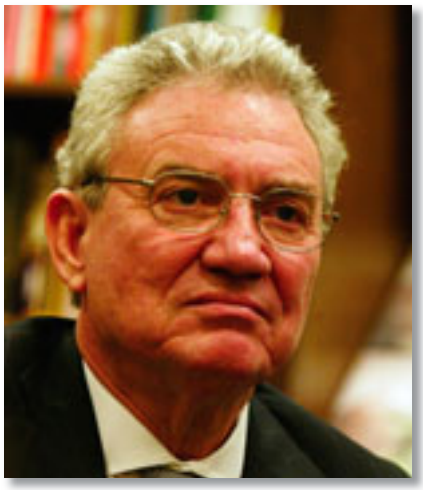
When It Raines It Pours

Whenever The Scrapbook finds the word "conscience" employed by a journalist, we feel obliged to plug in the old you-know-what detector and examine the specimen in some scientific detail. It's a genuinely distasteful job—mucking through the mounds of insufferable piety and wading through the cesspools of dishonesty and hysteria—but somebody has to do it.

This week's eruption comes from Howell Raines, the former executive editor of the *New York Times* who, since his firing in 2003 for presiding over (and covering up) the Jayson Blair fabrication and plagiarism scandal, has been writing regularly about the press for various publications. This past week found Raines in the *Washington Post*, and he pulled no punches:

> One question has tugged at my professional conscience throughout the year-long congressional debate over health-care reform, and it has nothing to do with the public option, portability or medical malpractice. It is this: Why haven't America's old-school news organizations blown the whistle on Roger Ailes, chief of Fox News, for using the network to conduct a propaganda campaign against the Obama administration—a campaign without precedent in our modern political history?

Sad to say, in the balance of his piece, poor Raines loses control. Fox News, he complains, has a "cadre of raucous commentators" and "video ferrets" who reinforce "Foxian reality . . . [with] actors . . . brought on camera to illustrate a preconceived universe as rigid as that of medieval morality." For according to Howell Raines's version of modern political history, Americans have always strongly supported nationalized health care and, Ailes/Fox News notwithstanding, never more so than today.



Howell Raines

The Scrapbook should say, at this juncture, that Roger Ailes is a big boy, and Fox News is no fledgling organization, and they can take care of themselves when bitten in the ankle by a duck. But you have to sit back for a moment and savor Raines's vision of those "old-school news organizations"—the *Times* and *Post*, Dan Rather's CBS, the Associated Press, *Newsweek*, NPR—quaking in fear of Roger Ailes and Fox News, keeping their mouths shut. In Raines's view, reporters and columnists not employed by Fox News are "intimidated by [its] financial power and expanding audience, as well as Ailes's proven willingness to dismantle the reputation of anyone who crosses him."

Well, anyone who believes that is probably prepared to believe that Jayson Blair was hired as a reporter on merit, and wrote factual, scrupulously edited stories in Howell Raines's *New York Times*. For the truth is that if there is a news organization in the United States that has restrained itself from speaking ill of Roger Ailes, or a journalist who has caught himself before writing critically about Fox News, we would like to know his/her/their name. In the rarefied circles in which Howell Raines travels, envy/contempt for the success of Ailes and Fox News—in journalistic as well as business terms—is not just rampant, but an essential component of their common vocabulary.

Indeed, the larger proposition is not that Fox News has manufactured opposition to Obamacare, as Raines charges, but that it has faithfully reported the inconvenient truth that the "congressional debate over health-care reform" has deepened and hardened public sentiment against Obamacare. Which may be especially difficult for Howell Raines to comprehend, since he and his fellow denizens of "old-school news organizations" have long practiced the black art of abusing their status as journalists in a free society to conduct political propaganda campaigns, and malign people (Ailes) and institutions (Fox News) they don't like. ♦

The Los Angeles Machine

As a believer that state and local governments are laboratories of democracy, The Scrapbook was fascinated to learn of the innovation concocted by the lab rats of the Los Angeles City Council: software that automatically votes "yes" whether the member is present in the chamber or not.

As reported by David Zahniser and Maeve Reston of the *Los Angeles Times*, "Los Angeles City Council members have figured out how to be in two places at once." Their voting sofware "is set to automatically register each of the 15 lawmakers as a 'yes' unless members deliberately press a button to vote 'no.'" The reporters helpfully note that "lawmakers in New York and San Francisco are also allowed to leave their seats during meetings, but members must be in the room to have their votes recorded." Indeed, and not just in those cities.

Some of the examples compiled by Zahniser and Reston:

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■ On Nov. 24, the official record showed Councilwoman Janice Hahn casting a vote in favor of a new Villaraigosa appointee to deal with issues facing the city's disabled residents. In fact, she was in a private room at the time with lobbyist Ben Reznik discussing Ponte Vista, a proposed housing development in San Pedro.

■ On Jan. 8, the record had Councilman Richard Alarcon voting to seek hundreds of millions of dollars in federal stimulus funds for city initiatives. Instead, he was holding closed-door meetings across the corridor—first with a deputy mayor, then with city lawyers.

■ On Jan. 22, the record showed Councilman Herb Wesson voting to create a foreclosure prevention program. That occurred as he was smoking a cigarette in an outdoor courtyard that abuts the Spring Street steps of City Hall.

The Scrapbook suggests Angelenos may want to keep the software and get rid of the council members, rather than the other way around. The results probably won't differ and it will free up the lobbyists for productive work. ♦

'O Canada': We Like It the Way It Is

Fresh from the glow of the international spotlight on the Vancouver Olympics, Canada was again in the news last week, but not for any reason to do with athletics. Canadians banded together and stood "on guard" for their national anthem, making clear their displeasure at a recent recommendation in Parliament for a "gender neutral" rewrite.

In the speech from the throne, Governor General Michaëlle Jean targeted the phrase "true patriot love in all thy sons command." The wording of the original poem on which the anthem is based, written by Stanley Weir, reads "True patriot love thou dost in us command." The alteration from *us* to *sons* was made by Weir himself in 1914, when Canada for understandable reasons wished to laud "true patriot love" in her "sons."

What sparked this official call to action, after years of unheeded complaint from gender neutralists, is unclear to The Scrapbook. Perhaps, it was hearing the anthem an unusually large number of times in succession—the 14 Canadian golds were an all time record for our northern neighbors.

Although feminist senators have called for anthemic equality in years past, the issue is usually swept away faster than a curling stone. But this most recent proposal originated in the office of Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper. It was a maneuver that broadly missed the mark: Liberals called it a political ploy and accused Conservatives of not being serious about women's rights. Canadians, however, got right to the point of the matter demanding the anthem be left "the way it is."

The Scrapbook rises to applaud the people of Canada who, to their credit, with "true patriot love" called on their government to not waste time and taxpayer money on an anthem rewrite. Two days after the proposal was made, the prime minister's office announced no change to the anthem would be made since Canadians had "spoken loud and clear." ♦

Sentences We . . . Finished

This had all the makings of a classic "Sentences We Didn't Finish": "Chief Justice John Roberts is wrong about a lot of things—most things, actually . . . " But if the reader had just enough energy to go that

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extra inch in Eugene Robinson's Post-Partisan column in the *Washington Post* last week, he would have read, "but he may be right when he suggests that he and his black-robed colleagues should give the State of the Union address a pass. Their presence looks like a tradition whose time has come and gone."

As it turns out, the progressive Robinson agrees with the conservative Roberts that, in the words of the chief justice, "The image of having the members of one branch of government standing up, literally surrounding the Supreme Court, cheering and hollering while the Court—according to the requirements of protocol—has to sit there expressionless, I think is very troubling."

As for Justice Samuel Alito's "not true" comment mouthed when President Obama stood at the podium to complain about a recent Court decision, Robinson says Alito should be allowed the reaction: "He shook his head and muttered—and even in a setting of such high ceremony, some allowance has to be made for muttering." If Robinson had his way, "on State of the Union night, the justices can get together at the courthouse, order some takeout and watch the whole thing on the tube. They'll be free to cheer and boo all they want, just like the rest of us."

Of course if you didn't get through that first sentence, we understand—after all, Eugene Robinson is wrong about a lot of things—most things, actually . . . ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

'*Green Zone* looks at an American war in a way almost no Hollywood movie ever has: We're not the heroes, but the dupes. Its message is that Iraq's fabled 'weapons of mass destruction' did not exist, and that neocons within the administration fabricated them, lied about them . . . " (Roger Ebert, *Chicago Sun Times*, March 10, 2010). ♦

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Render Unto Mike

I met Michael Cromartie in 1985 at Windy Gap, a Christian retreat in North Carolina. As a recent convert, I was there to talk about the only religious subject about which I knew anything: how I happened to become a Christian in my 30s after having been blasé about religion for years. Mike was way ahead of me in the Christianity department.

Nonetheless, we soon got to be close friends. We both worked in Washington, lived in Virginia, and wound up attending the same church, the Falls Church. One thing I learned about Mike was that he'd spent a year commuting to Philadelphia to work as the mascot Hoops, a mixture of the Roadrunner and a chicken, for the 76ers, the city's NBA basketball team. Pretty cool, I thought. Mike and I had similar interests—sports, politics, Christianity.

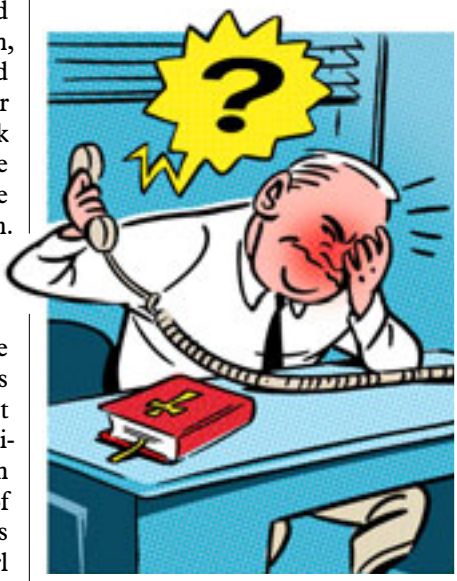
A few months before we met, Mike had applied for a job with the Ethics and Public Policy Center, a small but high-powered think tank. In his application, Mike noted his friendship with theologian Carl Henry, and the head of the center, Ernest Lefever, brought this up when he interviewed Mike. "Carl Henry came to my wedding," Mike told him. "Carl Henry's on our board," Lefever replied. "That's why I dropped his name," Mike said. He got the job.

His title was director of evangelical studies. This was a growing field in the 1980s, and Mike was (and still is) one of its few experts. The Christian Right had suddenly emerged as an important player in national politics. Yet its leaders and their motivations were not well known, especially to the press.

"I kept getting more and more calls from very smart writers who knew nothing about faith and religious beliefs," Mike says. He was amazed at their ignorance. They didn't know a fundamentalist from a Pentecostal or an evangelical.

In the late 1990s, Southern Baptists were caught up in a highly publicized debate on the proper relationship between men and women. This prompted a reporter for the *New York Times*—Mike won't divulge the name—to call and ask why the Baptists were making such fools of themselves.

"Well," Mike said, "it says in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 22 . . . " (the passage says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands"). The



CHRIS GASH

reporter stopped him with, "Who's the author of that? Who wrote it? Who published it?" At that point, "I realized I'd have to start at the beginning," Mike says.

A producer for CBS News asked Mike about the Christian Right: "Are they taking over the country?" No, Mike said. They're not even taking over the Republican party.

Mike didn't throw up his hands in despair. He likes and respects reporters and political writers, even those with whom he disagrees heartily.

Luis Lugo, who runs the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, was in sync with Mike on the need to educate the press on religion. They started with lunches, funded by Pew, in Washington that brought experts on religion together with a dozen or more print and TV reporters and writers.

Then Lugo told Mike, "Think bigger." The result was the Faith Angle Conference series. "The idea is to get mostly academics, but practitioners too, to explain some area of religion and public life to help journalists do their jobs better," Mike says. "This is not a hook to get them into a Bible study. It's not to convert anybody."

The conferences, which focus on three subjects over two days, started in Maine in 2002, then moved to Key West. Mike has recruited experts on Mormonism, Islam, Reinhold Niebuhr, and science and Christianity. Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California was a speaker.

Last week's conference was held in Miami's South Beach. James Davison Hunter of the University of Virginia argued Christian conservatives are undermining their cause by "politicizing values." David Gelernter of Yale insisted many Jews have adopted "obsessive liberalism" as a secular religion. Rabbi David Saperstein disagreed. Philip Jenkins of Penn State said disputes over homosexuality are indigenous to African Christianity, not exported to Africa by American Christians.

The conferences are, I believe, a rare recent example of the quality of journalism being improved. One participant, Adrian Wooldridge of the *Economist*, wrote in his book *God Is Back*, coauthored with John Micklethwait, that they are "one of the most pleasant as well as one of the most instructive experiences in journalism."

The question is whether the conferences will continue. Pew sponsored the first ten, then withdrew, and Mike scraped together funding from several sources for the eleventh in Miami. "There's not anybody, anywhere in the world, doing this," he says. And no one will be if the Cromartie conferences are sidelined.

Fred Barnes

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the weekly Standard

Athens and Jerusalem

Last Thursday, Athens was paralyzed by rioters protesting the government's austerity program, which is needed to keep the Greek nation solvent. The protesters chanted "No sacrifice" and "Higher pay."

That same day, near Jerusalem, the Palestinian Authority honored Dalal Mughrabi on what would have been her 50th birthday. A square was named after her in Ramallah. She and 11 other terrorists hijacked a bus in Israel in 1978, and killed 37 Israelis and one American.

The challenges posed by these developments are representative of those all civilized nations face. They aren't that complicated. Dealing with them doesn't require extraordinary subtlety of thought or exquisite elevation of soul. Common sense and courage will suffice.

Do we have to curb our profligacy today so we can be prosperous tomorrow? Common sense says yes. What does it take to do this? Basically, political and civic courage. Now, how to do this—how to cut budgets so we are living within our means, how to control the natural tendency of the welfare state to grow, how to get present-oriented populations to invest for the future, how to move from a public policy that doles out entitlements to one that sets a framework for achievement and self-reliance—this is a complex challenge of public policy and political strategy. But the fundamental challenge is simple. Not easy, but simple.

Similarly, the need to condemn rather than to tolerate (or even glorify) terror, the need to defeat rather than appease it, is obvious. Doing that in a resolute and determined way takes courage. How best to weaken and defeat the forces of jihadist terror, how to deal with the nations and cultures that are its breeding ground, how to mix together in one's policies hard and soft, smart and dumb power—that is complicated. But the basic challenge is simple. Not easy, but simple.

We need to resist indulgence at home and appeasement abroad. This task needn't be the subject of endless handwringing and conspicuous chinpulling. But it does require—to use an unfashionable phrase—moral virtue. In particular, it requires courage.

It takes courage for a polity to say no to the temptations of welfare state politics. It takes courage to turn away from the public trough and refuse to think of ourselves as victims and entitlees. It takes courage to become, once again, self-governing citizens. And it takes courage to rally ourselves to fight against—and to preempt—the forces of terror and the nations that harbor and sponsor them.

The Bible and the Greek philosophers disagree on many important things, but they seem to agree on the crucial role of courage in the lives of individuals and nations. Courage is the first of the moral virtues for Aristotle—perhaps because it is both important in itself and because it peculiarly makes the other virtues possible. When the Lord speaks to Joshua after the death of Moses, He tells him three times to "be strong and of a good courage" as he assumes leadership of the nation of Israel.

In June 1978, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a not unworthy heir to the traditions of Athens and Jerusalem, delivered the class day remarks at Harvard. Among other things, he said:

> A decline in courage may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days. The Western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each political party and of course in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society. Of course there are many courageous individuals but they have no determining influence on public life. Political and intellectual bureaucrats show depression, passivity and perplexity in their actions and in their statements and even more so in theoretical reflections to explain how realistic, reasonable as well as intellectually and even morally warranted it is to base state policies on weakness and cowardice. And decline in courage is ironically emphasized by occasional explosions of anger and inflexibility on the part of the same bureaucrats when dealing with weak governments and weak countries, not supported by anyone, or with currents which cannot offer any resistance. But they get tongue-tied and paralyzed when they deal with powerful governments and threatening forces, with aggressors and international terrorists.
>
> Should one point out that from ancient times decline in courage has been considered the beginning of the end?

By the end of the 1980s, it seemed Solzhenitsyn had been too pessimistic. In an impressive showing of moral courage and civic strength, the societies of the West confronted in that decade the threats of decadence at home and weakness abroad. Leaders like Reagan and Thatcher, John Paul II and Lech Walesa discovered reservoirs of moral virtue in their publics and rallied them to action.

The threats of 2010 are as great as those of 1980. They are intellectually different, of course—and perhaps even more complicated. But, like the threats of the Cold War, they cannot be overcome if we lack the simple and often prosaic virtue of courage. Can we, in our clever and sophisticated time, once again summon up this old-fashioned virtue?

—*William Kristol*

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Albany's Crime Spree

New York State government is a den of thieves.

BY FRED SIEGEL

ELWOOD H. SMITH

New York governor David Paterson, beset by charges of witness tampering in the case of a close aide accused of assaulting an ex-girlfriend, has spoken of legalizing ultimate fighting as a revenue raiser to help close the state's $8 billion plus budget gap. But New Yorkers looking for brawling entertainment need look no further than the Democratic caucus of the state senate where Paterson had been a member for 20 years.

During a debate on whether to expel Queens state senator Hiram Monserrate, who was convicted of a misdemeanor for trying to slash his girlfriend's throat with a piece of broken glass, State Senator Kevin Parker rose to the occasion. Parker, under indictment for attacking a news photographer, has a personal stake in defending Monserrate. Sent to anger-management counseling for punching a female traffic agent, the solidly built 5′11″ Parker could also be expelled if he's convicted in the photographer assault case.

Infuriated by comments of the 5′2″ Diane Savino, a state senator from Staten Island, that Monserrate could be immediately expelled with the cooperation of the Republicans, Parker, egged on by his political pals, charged at her screaming that she was a "f—ing bitch" because "the Republicans have no right to dictate what goes on in our house." When Jeffrey Klein of the Bronx leaped to Savino's defense, Parker turned on him—and in a version of B-movie dialogue screamed at Klein, "Do you want a piece of me?" "If that's what it takes to stop this," came Klein's retort.

With the possibility that Paterson will be forced out of office, New York could have its third governor in four years. Paterson's predecessor was Eliot "I'm a f—ing steamroller" Spitzer, a spoiled rich kid anointed by the *New Republic* as a liberal messiah (before the magazine discovered Barack Obama). Spitzer had a brief rocky stretch as governor after he was caught using the state police to try to gather incriminating evidence against political rival Joe Bruno. But it was his patronage of a brothel that brought down this self-proclaimed supporter of women's rights.

Scandal is routine in New York State, where soaring rhetoric about government—remember Mario

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Cuomo's "New York Idea"—has intersected with the unchecked growth of spending and the absence of competitive elections to produce a continuous crime scene. In recent years the state comptroller Alan Hevesi, a Democrat, and Joe Bruno, the Republican president of the state senate, have been convicted of shakedowns.

Bruno's defense is that the dapper 80-year-old hadn't behaved any differently than Shelly Silver, the speaker of the assembly. And Bruno was sort of right. Silver, a trial lawyer, is, thanks to the Albany rules, allowed to engage in honest graft on behalf of his law partners at Weitz and Luxenberg. Albany is a series of tollbooths erected as vehicles for extraction by different members of the government, with some more "legal" than others.

While a dozen state legislators have been indicted or convicted of stealing from the public purse, three have already gone to prison. They include former Bronx state senator Efraín González, who left office after surrendering to the feds on charges that he pumped state funds through a nonprofit he controlled back into his own pocket, to pay for new homes for his wife and mistress as well as a renovation for his mother-in-law's home and a vacation place in the Dominican Republic. In the Albany political world, nonprofits are synonymous with criminal enterprises.

Queens assemblyman Anthony Seminerio, who was elected on the Democratic, Republican, Independent, and Conservatives lines—third parties are a convenient source of corruption here since candidates are allowed to run under multiple ballot lines—has been convicted of taking half a million dollars in bribes from clients, largely hospitals and doctors, looking to cash in on New York's Medicaid racket. There's plenty to skim: The Empire State spends more on Medicaid than California and Texas combined.

A lawmaker captured the mindset of Seminerio and company when he said,

> When you sit around and look at what you've accomplished and look at all the people you've helped get rich, you say, "What the hell. Maybe I'm not doing it right." If you're not motivated by good, you wonder why you're helping other people and not yourself.

Albany, a political "enterprise zone," is a paradise for lawmakers who have gone into business for themselves. In a state which between 2000 and 2008 experienced a domestic outmigration of 1.5 million people—the highest in the country—almost the only job growth has come from the rapid rise in the number of lobbyists. Between 2000 and 2007 the number of lobbyists doubled from 3,000 to 6,000, while money spent on lobbying grew even faster, jumping from $66 million to $171 million. That makes New York the lobbying capital of America with 24 lobbyists per legislator. Illinois, the land not of Lincoln, but of Blagojevich, is a distant second with 12. And of course since lobbyists need people to lunch with, Albany has the second largest legislative staff (after Pennsylvania) in the United States. Albany's 212 legislators employ 2,751 staffers, that's 650 more than California which has almost twice the population.

While a dozen state legislators have been indicted or convicted of stealing from the public purse, three have already gone to prison. In the Albany political world, nonprofits are synonymous with criminal enterprises.

David Grandeau, who was deposed as head of the state lobbying commission for an excess of honesty and integrity, summed up the situation. "Don't they realize that you end up with fiscal crises because there is no integrity?" Grandeau for all his virtues is insufficiently cynical. New York's pols fully understand the situation; they understand that while the state is in decline they're doing pretty well.

Consider the group of characters who came together to rally support for David Paterson in his time of troubles. They were convened by Al Sharpton, of Tawana Brawley and 125th Street Massacre fame, who owes $1.5 million in back taxes to the federal government but rolls along thanks to kid-glove press coverage and half-a-million dollar third party contributions indirectly drawn on Mayor Bloomberg's bank accounts. Sharpton was joined by Representative Charlie Rangel, a man with his own mountain of ethical failings. Rangel, who occupies four Manhattan rent-regulated apartments in the name of fighting poverty, while hiding the rents from his Dominican villa on his financial statement, has been forced to step down as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee after he was slapped on the wrist for accepting corporate money to attend a Caribbean junket. Rangel, who's a key player in writing the tax code, explained of the junket money that it was his staff's fault; he hadn't intentionally violated the rules.

Less well known is Malcolm Smith, one of the Democratic leaders of the chaotic state senate, who's been in the headlines for siphoning money donated to a nonprofit supposedly on behalf of Katrina hurricane victims. In 2008, Smith wowed a group of lobbyists, who had paid $75,000 apiece to hear him speak at a golf outing, by telling them, as the Democrats were on the verge of taking control of the state senate, that they should think of his fundraising event as being like an IPO. He told the group, according to a lobbyist who was there, that they "should get in early because then it doesn't cost as much. The longer you wait to get in, he said, the more it will cost you, and if you don't get in at all, then it will be painful." Corruption is so routine in Albany, notes *New York Daily News* columnist Michael

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Goodwin, that it is hardly noticed. "A roll call in the legislature could be a lineup at the local precinct."

More recently Smith was involved with congressman Gregory Meeks and former congressman Floyd Flake in winning a rigged bid to operate casinos at Aqueduct Race track, in return for endorsing David Paterson's now defunct reelection campaign. One of Smith's key partners was Darryl Greene. In 1999, Greene was convicted of stealing $500,000 from New York City agencies. In New York, scandal leads not to reform but to more scandals.

David Paterson unintentionally summed it all up. Referring to the legislature's unwillingness to slow the rate of spending in an economic downturn, Paterson complained that "Albany is a kind of political bizarro world, where there is no gravity, where light waves bend right around the capitol." And in this bizarro world, it's the most minor of infractions that might be the final straw forcing Paterson to step down. The same staffer whose girlfriend had wanted a restraining order (and who rose to power when another top aide resigned after blaming his failure to pay taxes on "depression") had earlier harassed the Yankees for World Series tickets. No big deal, but then according to the usually supernumerary state Commission on Public Integrity, Paterson perjured himself in testifying about it, even backdating a check to cover up the unnecessary lie.

If Paterson steps down, the man he appointed lieutenant governor, 76-year-old Richard Ravitch, a hero of the 1975 New York City fiscal crisis, who strangely is not a creature of the Albany cesspool, will take over. But not even Ravitch's formidable skills will be enough to return law and order in the form of budgetary sanity to the Albany Gang. The state may be dying, but its political class, a few prison sentences notwithstanding, is thriving. Only pressure from the financial markets—à la Greece—could return gravity to this political "bizarro world." ♦

Remedial Diplomacy

The point is not to reward one's enemies and punish one's friends. BY SETH CROPSEY

Barack Obama's theory is that partisanship is the source of conflict. There should be no more red states or blue states. Every political choice is a false choice, an example of old thinking. Similarly on the international stage. If the United States distanced itself from its allies and drew closer to its adversaries, conflict would be reduced. The United States could then serve as the international mediator rather than as the guarantor of global order and an agent of democratic political change. The most recent example of these ideas is the Obama administration's renewed antipathy for Britain in its current dispute with Argentina over the Falkland Islands.

Geologic surveys indicate the possibility of up to 60 billion barrels of oil beneath the seabed 60 to 100 miles north of the Falkland Islands. This possibility led to the beginning of exploratory drilling in early February and reopened the tensions between the United Kingdom and Argentina that resulted in the Falklands war of 1982. A consortium of British and Australian firms transported a rig to the area. And Argentine president Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, whose attempt to tax agricultural exports and use central bank reserves to pay down the nation's massive debt have been hugely unpopular, saw and seized an opportunity to divert the attention of the populace.

Argentina's foreign minister, Jorge Taiana, asked for a meeting with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, called the British firms' exploration "illegitimate," and demanded a discussion with British officials on their claim to sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. Argentina announced that it will blockade shipping between its ports and the Falkland Islands, which the Argentines call the Malvinas.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown pointed to the 1,000-man contingent of British forces stationed in the Falklands and warned that the U.K. would again defend the islands' 3,000 residents—none of whom wish to become Argentine citizens—as well as Britain's right under international law to explore for oil. The *Times* of London reported on February 24 that a submarine had been dispatched to support the Royal Navy surface ship stationed in the Falklands.

Both the U.K. and Argentina have seen their militaries contract substantially since the 74-day conflict that Britain won decisively in 1982. Argentina has prepared the diplomatic ground better and claims the support of many of its neighbors. But the U.K. still possesses enough naval force and logistical support to carry the day if it comes to that. And the U.K. can still draw on logistical support—as it did 28 years ago—at Gibraltar and Ascension Island (several hundred miles below the Equator) in the South Atlantic.

The Obama administration responded initially by declaring its neutrality. "We are aware not only of the current situation but also of the history, but our position remains one of neutrality," a State Department spokesman declared in late February. "The United States recognizes de facto U.K. administration of the islands but takes no position on the sovereignty claims of either party."

Seth Cropsey is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute. He served in the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations as deputy undersecretary of the Navy.

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In early March Secretary of State Hillary Clinton changed the U.S. position during her visit to Buenos Aires. At a joint news conference the deeply unpopular Argentine president (a poll last summer put her approval rating at 28 percent) insisted that the U.K. and Argentina enter into talks about the Falklands. She invoked the authority of the U.N.'s decolonization committee, a body whose agenda mentions among other "non-self-governing territories" American Samoa, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. "And we agree," interjected Clinton, notwithstanding State's earlier expression of neutrality and the U.K.'s repeated assertion that the Falklands' sovereignty is not negotiable. What sort of neutrality is it that takes the side of a party seeking talks about an issue that the opposing party says is nonnegotiable?

Clinton seems, moreover, not to have considered the colonial element of this issue. Britain took possession of the uninhabited Falkland Islands a decade and a half before the United States defeated Mexico in a war we started that added the inhabited area now known as Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, Texas, and parts of New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming. The American possessions currently listed by the U.N.'s decolonization committee include Guam, which is fast becoming the United States' most important military base in the Western Pacific. Men have lived on Guam for most of the life span of the 5,000- year-old bristlecone pines that dot the lands we took by force from Mexico in 1848. There are much better reasons for "decolonizing" Guam than decolonizing the Falklands, which were a Magellanic penguin colony before they became a British one.

The Obama administration should think this one through carefully. Returning the bust of Churchill to the British embassy and snubbing Prime Minister Brown by failing to hold the traditional post-meeting press conference shortly after Obama was inaugurated last year might be dismissed as mere awkward gestures. The same could be argued about such events as Obama's initial unwillingness to meet with the Dalai Lama. It cannot be said of breaking agreements to base U.S. ballistic missile defense systems on the territory of such good friends as Poland and the Czech Republic—or supporting Hugo Chávez's Honduran ruler colleague who sought illegally to continue his term in office, or scaring off friendly and important segments of Lebanese society by seeking accommodation with Syria, which remains implacably hostile to the United States.

No. With qualified exceptions such as Afghanistan and the credit the administration has begun to claim for progress in Iraq, the Obama administration's foreign policy seeks to jettison the United States' traditional vision of itself as an agent of democratic political change and replace it with the goal of becoming the prime international mediator. The administration's calculation is that discarding erstwhile friends

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will moderate current adversaries as it prevents the rise of future ones. Such policy is absurd so long as the United States remains a democracy and the object of envy for its economic and military power. Seeking to become the global arbitrator makes even less sense if U.S. power declines, since the critical element in international mediation is the ability to enforce one's will.

The unfolding Falklands dispute crystallizes the tension within the administration between its ambition to become the great international mediator and its practical understanding that our security depends importantly on success in Afghanistan and Iraq. Britain is our closest international partner. Britain's leaders have demonstrated this association at their own political risk by supporting us in Iraq and continuing to support us in Afghanistan despite the British public's misgivings about both. We need their help if the NATO coalition in Afghanistan is to succeed. They should be rewarded, not punished, for siding with us.

At the same time the Obama administration is bending over backwards—as Secretary of State Clinton's support for the Argentine president shows—to prove our credentials for impartiality, oddly, with a South American leader who is close to Hugo Chávez. Last fall Chávez said publicly that he would be happy to supply Iran with uranium. He will if he can find any. It's a strange position, disrespecting the allies who are helping us destroy radical Islamists and playing up to Argentine politicians who are thick with another Latin American caudillo, one who is in cahoots with the most dangerous of the Islamists.

Mollifying China, Russia, Syria, Iran, or Latin American demagogues will earn the United States nothing but their disdain. It will not change their ambitions. Obama needs to decide whether he wants steadfast allies or an international atmosphere in which contempt for the United States unites our adversaries with our erstwhile friends. Remembering that Britain is our closest ally would be a good place to start. ♦

Requiem for a Lightweight

The final days of Barbara Boxer?

BY **K.E. GRUBBS JR.**

You're a California Republican and, this being an election year, anxiety is mounting. Your state endures unspeakable economic crises, mostly caused by the union-Democratic axis of Sacramento. Unemployment numbers are higher than the national average, and you're hearing financial experts declare your deficit-plagued, once-golden state to be in worse shape than—oh the indignity!—Greece.

What to do? You might just be able to keep a Republican governor, never mind that the term of the current one, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is coming to an inglorious end. After all, the Democrats appear poised to nominate Attorney General Jerry Brown. Yes, *that* Jerry Brown, "Governor Moonbeam" himself, who after three decades wants another shot. You've got two exceptional candidates in former eBay CEO Meg Whitman and Insurance Commissioner Steve Poizner. If they don't commit mutual destruction before the June 8 primary, you might avert the seventies insanity all over again.

Carly Fiorina, a breast cancer survivor, relishes a fight with Boxer, who, she notes, routinely manufactured gender issues with which to punch her three previous opponents, all males.

K.E. Grubbs Jr. is a Washington-based writer.

Except that Washington, D.C., now in the hands of the Democratic left, could steer the economy, including California's pivotal part of it, to grim levels unknown even in the Stagnant Decade. Suddenly, firing the state's junior senator—which could help deny Vice President Joe Biden a decisive vote in the upper house—looks not only imperative but downright plausible.

In Hollywood's home state, visuals are everything. Here's one from a June 2009 congressional hearing: Brigadier General Michael Walsh, answering questions from three-term junior senator Barbara Boxer, politely addresses her as "Ma'am." At which point a shrewish, hyper-feminist Boxer turns the committee room into an icebox:

> Do me a favor. Could you say "senator" instead of "ma'am"? It's just a thing. I worked so hard to get that title, so I'd appreciate it—yes, thank you.

The video went viral, and even in a state favorably disposed to women's rights, the Bay Area's Boxer failed the screen test. California's voters have lately been holding her approval ratings below 50 percent.

Three GOP challengers now sense that those voters may finally be in a mood to replace this unapologetic tribune of the antiwar, enviro-left, who has spent her last term pursuing a jobs-killing cap and trade scheme.

The first to draw media attention was former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina, whose friendship with Senator John McCain throughout the 2008 presidential campaign—and lack of previous political interest—stirred suspicions from conservatives. Before and after her November 3, 2009, declaration of candidacy in an *Orange County*

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Register op-ed, Fiorina has devoted herself to allaying those suspicions.

She's done so, for the most part. And convincingly, as I learned not long ago at a small breakfast gathering in Georgetown. Boxer, she predicted, will try to make the election a referendum on liberal values, with the senator lined up on the progressive side of every issue. The senator imagines most Californians share her views, a dubious assumption in this recession. Fiorina, by contrast, plans to define the issues as jobs, out of control spending, bigger government, higher taxes, and the thicket of regulations Washington plans to layer on top of already burdensome rules.

Fiorina, a breast cancer survivor, relishes a fight with Boxer, who, she notes, routinely manufactured gender issues with which to punch her three previous opponents, all males. Boxer will thus be made to defend the command economy she and her Capitol Hill colleagues are designing against a proven champion of opportunity-creating markets. Fiorina expects to attract more donors from an oppressed business community, recently freed to contribute without limit by the Supreme Court; she has led the way by spending $2.5 million of her own money already.

For the benefit of skeptical pro-lifers, some of whom claim to have espied pro-choice weasel words in various of her statements, Fiorina recently told this magazine she favors overturning *Roe* v. *Wade*. If Boxer and the Democratic left are publicly (and predictably) scandalized by that, Fiorina expects to pivot easily to the economy.

With no need to establish conservative bona fides, Irvine assemblyman Chuck DeVore has spent the last year campaigning in both old- and new-fashioned ways. He's stumped up and down the state, driving himself to the farthest reaches of the red-county interior to pick up support from remote Republican clubs, all along regaling Facebook followers with details of his travels. In early March, despite Fiorina's own pitch to the activist group, DeVore easily picked up the endorsement of the stalwart right-wing California Republican Assembly.

Clockwise from top left: Boxer, Fiorina, Campbell, DeVore

TOP IMAGES, NEWSCOM; BOTTOM, ASSOCIATED PRESS / RICH PEDRONCELLI

DeVore, a retired lieutenant colonel in the National Guard and a onetime aide to the late defense secretary Caspar Weinberger, has been a fixture in Orange County politics for more than two decades. (Disclaimer: He and his picture-perfect family are longtime friends of the writer and the writer's wife, having shared holiday dinners and church pews.) Though a vice president of an aerospace firm, he has spent much of that time in pursuit of elected office.

Arriving in Sacramento in 2004, DeVore quickly became a leading conservative figure, promoting nuclear power and offshore drilling, pushing prison reform, holding the line against taxes. On Valentine's Day 2009, to the consternation of the governor and the GOP leadership, DeVore resigned his position as chief Republican whip in protest of a $12 billion per year tax increase.

A thoughtful student of history who's even tried his hand at fiction (he coauthored a novel about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan), DeVore has everything one could want in a U.S. senator, including a Churchillian anecdote about being shot at in Lebanon. He found a brainy communications director named Josh Trevino, who has been trying to position DeVore as the Scott Brown of California.

California, as purple as Massachusetts, does enjoy a renegade history, from Hiram Johnson's progressives to Howard Jarvis's tax revolt, and indeed the taxpayers' association created by Prop 13's late, curmudgeonly author has endorsed DeVore. The question arises: Does his perpetual pursuit of political office translate into a virtual incumbency, a liability even for so principled a figure?

Enter Tom Campbell, a former congressman from Silicon Valley who's taught law at Stanford and served as dean of UC Berkeley's business school. Campbell has sought the same Senate seat before, losing a primary in 1992 to the sainted conservative TV commentator Bruce Herschensohn, who then lost to Boxer.

Campbell, appointed state finance director by Schwarzenegger, appeals to blue voters with his centrist positions on abortion and same-sex marriage. But he suffers from his association with the administration's handling of the state's cash. He suffers as well from a perception of opportunism, having come lately from the governor's

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race—where he had no hope against the Whitman and Poizner fortunes.

A few days ago the three Senate candidates came together to debate for the first time on Eric Hogue's Sacramento radio program. His voice quavering and defensive, Campbell spent a chunk of the hourlong event demanding an apology from Fiorina, whose aide Marty Wilson was alleged to have called him anti-Semitic in a private conversation, a charge Wilson stoutly denies. The opening gave Fiorina and DeVore a chance to highlight Campbell's inconsistent support for Israel and his dubiously cordial relations with Sami Al-Arian, the Florida professor who pleaded guilty to helping terrorists.

For his part, DeVore tried to clobber Fiorina with what looks like over-imaginative opposition research (which may have originated with the Boxer camp). When she headed H-P, goes the accusation, Fiorina allowed another company, tied to H-P contractually, to sell computer equipment to Iran. Turns out, the product was printer ink, not exactly coming under strict export control.

Barbara Boxer can take little comfort from these early round fisticuffs thrown amongst her opposition. A mid-January Rasmussen survey showed her with 46 percent of all California voters against any of the three Republicans. Campbell, then the new entrant, had 42 percent; Fiorina, 43 percent; DeVore, 40 percent. A Field Poll (which historically skews left) taken of likely GOP voters at roughly the same time showed Campbell with 30 percent, Fiorina with 25 percent, and DeVore with 6 percent. Campbell has since damaged himself in the debate.

It's eight months before the general election, and Californians are restive. Republicans in the state are both anxious about the economy and emboldened by Boxer's new vulnerability. A Tea Party could get under way, and either DeVore or a freshly combative Fiorina could come across as the next Scott Brown. And Barbara Boxer, despite being a three-term incumbent, could crumble like the Parthenon. ♦

The Anti-Jobs Bill

Obamacare would badly undermine America's economic prospects.

BY JAMES C. CAPRETTA & YUVAL LEVIN

Once Obamacare is locked in, the president will argue that we must raise taxes.

NEWSCOM

After a year of debate and legislative scheming, President Obama and congressional Democrats are making one last push for their ill-conceived health care plan. Fittingly, the endgame is as unseemly as the various maneuvers and backroom deals that got them this far. .

The procedural machinations are outrageous and embarrassing. But they are not nearly as bad as the substance of what the Democrats are pushing. Obamacare (like the public's distaste for it) has not changed—and the sordid details of the desperate struggle to pass the bill must not cause us to forget its ruinous implications for the country. It is a sweeping and expensive plan to put the federal government in the driver's seat of American health care. But no less important than the dangers it poses for American medicine are the ways it threatens to undermine the nation's prosperity.

The heart of the Democratic plan is a promise to provide subsidized insurance coverage to some 35 to 40 million people. This will cost about $200 billion per year by 2019. And despite all of the talk of bending the cost curve, the Congressional Budget Office says the price will grow by 8 percent per year every year thereafter—which parallels the rapid cost growth of Medicare and Medicaid over the last four decades. In other words, the White House and congressional Democrats want to create another runaway entitlement program, piled on top of the unaffordable ones that are already slated to bankrupt the government.

Taxpayers recognize this. They see lawmakers running up debt at an unprecedented pace and understand it cannot go on much longer. As they

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watch the Democrats race ahead to put in place yet another long-term spending commitment, they fear when the next shoe will drop: Once Obamacare is locked in, it will only be a matter of time before the president and other Democrats argue that we must raise taxes to head off a debt crisis that their reckless spending helped to hasten.

Beyond taxes and spending, Obamacare would also wreak havoc on the labor market. Because employers would get penalized if any of their low- and moderate-wage workers ended up in the new subsidized insurance pool, they would avoid hiring such workers. Democrats claim they want to jam through health care reform so they can turn their attention to jobs, but the bill provides a strong disincentive for businesses to hire those who need jobs the most.

The plan would, moreover, trigger an inefficient and costly re-sorting of American labor. Under the bill, despite the enormous cost of subsidizing coverage in the new government-run "exchanges," only 18 million people would be getting such subsidized coverage in 2016—even though there are 127 million Americans today with incomes in the targeted range of between one and four times the poverty rate. The vast majority of workers would still be in job-based plans and get no additional help. Gene Steuerle of the Urban Institute estimates that a worker making about $60,000 per year in 2016 would get $4,500 more in federal aid if he were able to get his insurance through an exchange rather than through his employer. That's a powerful incentive for workers and firms to rearrange their operations to take advantage of the federal money. In time, the American economy would be divided into companies with low-wage workers getting government-subsidized health care and others with higher-wage workers who continue to get employer-based plans. This would make the labor market far less efficient (harming productivity), and it would mean that the subsidies themselves would cost far more than the CBO now estimates.

And for those workers who do end up getting federal subsidies for their insurance, the program is a trap. If they get a pay raise, they will lose some of their insurance subsidy. Indeed, the schedule of subsidy withdrawal is so severe that it will push many low-wage families into effective tax brackets of 60 percent to 80 percent, according to a CATO Institute analysis. Obamacare would thus provide a strong disincentive to work and so undermine the most successful policy initiative in generations: welfare reform.

The health care debate is not just about health care. The Democrats' bill is so massive, so far-reaching, and so poorly designed that its implications for the larger economy (and especially for employment, which should now be Washington's top priority) could be immense—and disastrous. For the sake of the economy, no less than for that of American health care, Congress should pause, think, and start over. ♦

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Obama Just Says No to Soros

Drug-war funding has actually increased on his watch. BY JOHN P. WALTERS

For anyone who feared that the Obama administration would abandon efforts to control illegal drugs, the president's first year in office has been on balance reassuring.

The anti-antidrug camp had high hopes that Barack Obama would end "drug prohibition." Last year, George Soros, a leading proponent of drug legalization and perhaps the most generous financial backer of the president, seemed in a position to get the change he wanted. In fact, Obama drug czar Gil Kerlikowske made it his first order of business to tell the press he was ending "the drug war." More significantly, Attorney General Eric Holder announced that federal enforcement regarding "medical marijuana" would be dialed back, which caused the number of storefront marijuana shops in Los Angeles to skyrocket.

Things are looking a little different a year later, however. Kerlikowske turned old school and proclaimed that drug legalization was not in the administration's "vocabulary." The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) continues to enforce marijuana laws in California (although without vocal support from Holder). And the Obama administration just released its first drug control budget requesting a fully funded, well, drug war. At the end of the Bush administration, federal drug control spending in fiscal year 2009 was $15 billion—65 percent of it devoted to border security, law enforcement, and other supply control efforts. Obama wants $15.5 billion in 2011, 64 percent for supply control—an increase of $100 million over Bush's final year.

President Obama did not speak of the importance of drug treatment in his first State of the Union address as his predecessor had, but he requested a bit more money for it—all to the good. And he even tried to avoid adding these funds to the most unaccountable federal treatment programs.

The Obama administration could draw attention to a magnificent example of turning the tide against drugs and terror—the great drug war victory led by Colombia's president and supported by both the Clinton and the Bush administrations.

Last year, Congress and the administration cut prevention funding 17 percent, the only significant change from 2009. This year, the administration is seeking to restore some, but not all, of that cut.

The drug-legalization zealots may be singing "Meet the new boss, same as the old boss." But with the exception of the Carter administration, when some senior members of the White House staff favored legalization, every president from Richard Nixon through Barack Obama—Republican and Democrat—has sought to attack both supply and demand. It was during the Carter administration that the drug problem exploded, leading to the worst destruction from substance abuse in living memory and the enduring root of the smaller problem still with us today.

It is very important that President Obama has not listened to George Soros on drugs. Should we expect anything more? Are there any signs that the president cares about the drug problem? Will he actually show some leadership on this issue? If he wanted to, he could teach young people something. He could say that illegal drugs make people sick, and his generation did not understand this and paid a horrible price for its ignorance. Now we know better, and we should act like it. If he wanted to show real courage, he could say we know that marijuana makes people sick and that marijuana is the illegal drug causing the greatest dependency and addiction by far. He could even say it is time to stop several decades of lying to ourselves about marijuana and teaching that lie to our children.

President Obama as no other president before him could use his appeal to youth to end, almost overnight, the cultural dogma that drugs are cool. It would be easy for him to become the greatest contributor to drug abuse prevention since Nancy Reagan—and he could explain how difficult it is to stop using these substances even when you know better, as he has found with cigarettes.

Of course, none of this is likely to happen. The Obama administration has shown itself willing to spend to support antidrug programs, but it probably will not lead at home and abroad in the areas where truly historic gains are possible.

President Alvaro Uribe in Colombia has all but taken his country back from drug trafficking terrorists. One result of Uribe's victories is that dramatically less cocaine reaches American cities. Is that not important to President Obama? The Obama administration could draw attention to this magnificent example of turning the tide against drugs and terror and explain how it happened—a great drug war victory led by Colombia's president and supported by both the

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Clinton and the Bush administrations. If similar efforts are led, adapted, and sustained in Mexico and Afghanistan, the damage caused by cocaine, heroin, and marijuana in the United States and globally can be dramatically reduced. The changes would be profound. Does President Obama see this? Thus far, there is no evidence he thinks about it at all.

The president surely did not need Charles Lane of the *Washington Post* to tell him "medical marijuana is an insult to our intelligence." But the president and all his key officials—Eric Holder, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration Margaret Hamburg, and even Gil Kerlikowske—are playing dumb as "medical marijuana" is brought to Washington, D.C. The agencies of the federal government know what a dangerous fraud this has been in California and particularly in its large cities—Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Francisco. It is beyond question that "medical marijuana" fosters rapid rises in abuse, addiction, and crime. The *Post* has reported this in detail. Does the capital of the United States need a bigger drug problem? Are all these Obama administration officials really too busy to make the obvious argument that "medical marijuana" is a stupid and dangerous fraud?

We are fortunate that President Obama has resisted the wrongheaded advice of George Soros. But it is not enough. Today, leadership is needed on curbing use of marijuana, helping Mexico defeat the traffickers, and working to integrate the battle against terror and drugs in Afghanistan. On these issues the new boss is failing, and there are already troubling survey results indicating youth drug use may be about to rise. Attitudes about drugs are a product of teaching, not mere spending. The annual reports of historic rates of substance abuse among aging Baby Boomers should have taught us by now that exposing our children to these substances is not dangerous for them only as teens. All too often, substance abuse lasts a lifetime. ♦

NEWSCOM

Only Direct

Conservatives should not cede the precincts of popular culture. BY ED GILLESPIE

In 2008, John McCain and Sarah Palin not only had to run against Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and the Democrats' usual allies in the news media, they faced an onslaught from entertainment media as well. Everyone remembers *Saturday Night Live*'s skewering portrayals of Palin and McCain and President Bush, but we shouldn't forget the constant stream of ridicule from Leno and Letterman, Stewart and Colbert, and the Obama boosterism of Oprah and *The View*. Movies like *Lions for Lambs* and *Rendition* reinforced liberal narratives about Iraq, torture, and America's loss of moral standing. And did anyone in Hollywood actually think Oliver Stone's movie *W* would make money when it came out just before the election?

Patricia Heaton

Bo Derek

For liberals engaged in shaping our culture, making money often seems to be an ancillary pursuit. They've understood for decades something conservatives have only recently grasped: Politics is downstream from culture.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that in films and on television, trial lawyers are cast as virtuous crusaders while American soldiers are bloodthirsty villains or hapless victims. University professors are almost always noble and underpaid, corporate CEOs corrupt and overpaid. Wealth is only inherited, never created, and people are poor only because they were born that way, never because of bad decisions or behavior. Conservative politicians are usually unbearable hypocrites, people of faith are for comic relief, and our environment is under constant assault by capitalism's wantonly wasteful ways.

It's somewhat remarkable that despite decades of liberal dominance of movies, TV shows, plays, and popular music so many Americans remain as politically conservative as they are. But conservatives should not cede to liberals the precincts of popular culture any more than they should cede to them the precincts of politics.

Fortunately, an effort by conservatives to engage in "culture making" is moving from the edges of the industry to the mainstream, threatening the left's grip on Hollywood. The more successful this effort is, the more American popular culture will extol the values that have made our country great. Eventually, it may become just as cool to believe in the principles of free enterprise, the need for strong national security, the merits of traditional families, and the value of religious faith as it is to sneer at capitalism, demean the military, denigrate parents, and deride religion.

A growing cadre of conservatives in the culture (not necessarily the same as "cultural conservatives") are finding one another and offering mutual sup-

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port. Right-leaning actors, screenwriters, directors, producers, songwriters, playwrights, set designers, and others in the entertainment industry are providing one another the comfort of strength in numbers.

Some notable stars have acknowledged their conservatism over the years, usually at the stage of their careers when they can withstand the inevitable ostracism from the liberals at the top of the Hollywood pecking order. (Outrage in the media over the widely recognized political blacklisting in Hollywood has been conspicuously absent.) People like Bo Derek, Jon Voight, Patricia Heaton, Kelsey Grammer, and Janine Turner are among those whose more conservative views are widely known.

I remember a conversation with Bo Derek in which she said she frequently had cameramen, assistant directors, less well-known actors, and others furtively whisper to her that they shared her views and were glad she was speaking out. This kind of whispering among those in the entertainment industry who don't espouse the liberal line has gotten a little louder. A recent gathering of conservatives and centrists in the entertainment industry numbered more than 1,000 people.

Some are willing to put themselves on the line politically, adding their names in support of conservative candidates and causes. But the greater impact may be from their efforts to shape the culture in ways that reject the nihilism so favored by the Hollywood elite in favor of more traditional American values.

Movies that reflect mainstream values have a history of doing very well financially, the most recent example being *The Blind Side*, a faith-infused film that crushed at the box office this winter. *The Pursuit of Happyness*, the 2006 movie starring Will Smith, was the true story of a single father completely dedicated to a young son who succeeded by becoming, of all things, a stock broker. (Interestingly, Smith's movies often contain a strong undercurrent of positive values.) The popular *Jerry Maguire* may be one of the greatest exaltations of marriage ever produced. *Juno* was a wonderful movie, its success magnified by word-of-mouth and postings on Facebook by pro-lifers.

Ralph Winter, who produced *Wolverine* and the *X Men* series, has joined with Terry Botwick, who helped launch the Family Channel, to form 1019 Productions. The firm will seek to bring to theaters entertaining movies that make money, but also make a positive impact on our society.

Although not explicitly conservative, a relatively new effort called The Wedgwood Circle Institute brings investors together to fund "cultural artifacts" that are "true, good and beautiful for the common good." Wedgwood Circle has religious roots, but its efforts are geared toward general audiences. Its projects are intended to have broad appeal and carry basically conservative messages of faith, family, and personal sacrifice.

Movies targeted to Christian audiences also tend to do well. Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia, has made a series of successful movies rooted in Christian faith, including *Facing the Giants* and *Fireproof*, a movie about the importance of commitment in marriage that was the highest grossing independent film of 2008.

Religious or not, the emerging conservative culture makers seek to make commercially profitable entertainment, building on past successes. Steve McEveety produced with Mel Gibson the classic paean to human freedom *Braveheart* and the smashingly successful *The Passion of the Christ* (surely the only blockbuster ever made in ancient Aramaic).

MPower Pictures, founded by McEveety and others, is now working to bring to film the *New York Times* bestseller *Left to Tell*, the story of Immaculee Ilibagiza, a Tutsi who survived the Rwandan genocide by being hidden in the tiny bathroom of a Hutu pastor with seven other women. The harrowing drama of her survival, her faith throughout her captivity, and her forgiveness of her family's killers is intended to be inspiring to general audiences. Janine Turner of *Northern Exposure* fame (along with my wife, Cathy, a veteran of decades in politics) is working with the producers.

Conservatives can curse the darkness or light culture candles. Thousands of conservatives rightly donate to candidates and political action committees, think tanks and other market-oriented and right-leaning groups, but investing in quality films, television shows, plays, and music can have an impact at least as great as a trainload of white papers. ♦

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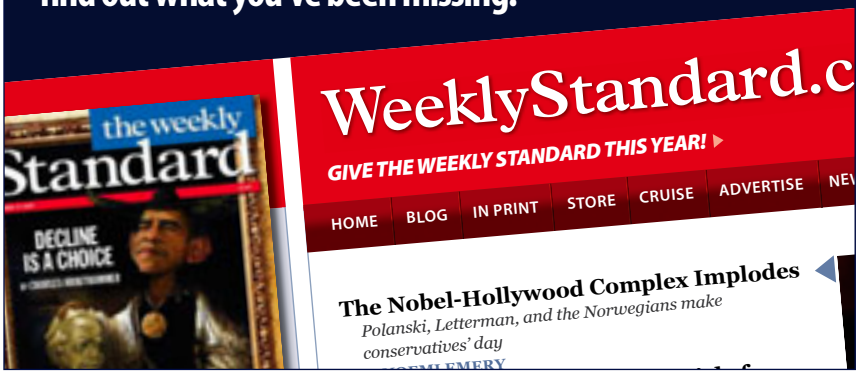

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Hope and Change in Iraq

The elections show a functioning democracy, if they can keep it.

By Reuel Marc Gerecht

In Iraq we are now where we should have been in 2005 if the Sunni Arab community had not staged a bloody revanchist insurrection. The parliamentary elections on March 7 gave us a good snapshot of the real Iraq: an insecure Sunni Arab minority more or less united in one bloc, the Shiite Arab majority building self-confidence and naturally fracturing along religious/secular lines, and the Kurdish (predominantly Sunni) minority united against the Arabs but internally fractious and increasingly dissatisfied with the two families who've ruled Kurdish politics for decades.

At first glance, we've got a four-way horse race, where shifting coalitions could produce surprising results (a Kurdish-religious Shiite coalition, a Sunni Arab-secular Shiite coalition, or even a Sunni Arab-Kurdish alliance, for example). Although the returns aren't final at this writing, it appears Shiite prime minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law slate has come in first; the Iraqiya coalition, which represents Arab Sunnis and some secular Shiites, a close second; and the National Alliance, which pulls together a wide array of Shiites, especially from the more religious south, a close third. The Kurds, meanwhile, split their vote between the Kurdish Alliance, which is the disputatious marriage of the Barzani and Talabani political machines, and the feisty independent Change Movement led by Nawshirwan Mustafa.

An Iraqi voter casts his ballot in Ramadi.

ASSOCIATED PRESS / KHALID MOHAMMED

If this outcome had been reached in 2005 we all could have popped the champagne. Instead, in 2005, only the Shiite Arabs and Kurds went en masse to the urns. Since then we've had three years of hell and one year of purgatory (Muslims have no intermediate stage between heaven and hell, but the new Iraq is going politically and theologically where no Arabs have gone before). Most pivotally, we had the Battle of Baghdad in 2006-07.

If Iraq continues down a democratic path, the results of that battle—not the presence of U.S. troops over the last seven years—will likely prove to have decided the country's fate. We will soon get to see whether Iraq's Sunni Arabs really can live with the military defeat they suffered in 2007 and the political defeat they suffered last week. We will soon get to see if they can live without the Americans (who, in a truly surreal turnaround, are now the protectors of the very Sunni Arabs who once drove the insurgency against the invader). Politically, the Iraqi Shia are unlikely to be generous with their erstwhile Sunni overlords. Washington can continue to encourage them to be so. But in Iraqi Shiite eyes what Washington has been doing since the surge began in 2007—when General David Petraeus started paying Sunni tribes to stand against al Qaeda and with the Americans—is bribing the Sunnis to behave. The administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama have wanted, truth be told, the Shia to accept a kind of affirmative action: For peace and a quicker American

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withdrawal, we've wanted the Shia to give the Arab Sunnis political and economic guarantees that exceed Sunni Arab electoral power. (The Arab Sunni community represents at most 20 percent of Iraq's population, the Shiite Arabs about 60 percent, and the Kurds the remaining 20 percent.)

In a very Arab way, the Americans have been trying to fight sectarianism through a reward system based on sect. Good democrats that we are, Americans don't say this. But ideally that's what we'd like to see: a firm informal understanding that gives the Arab Sunnis a political check on the Shiite majority. Such an arrangement has become ever more appealing in Washington as the specter of Iranian influence in Iraq has risen. Although Washington's foreign-policy establishment is usually too sophisticated to say flatly that Shiite equals pro-Persian, a pro-Arab-Sunni reflex is deeply embedded in the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon, and much of the think tank world that feeds the government. It's an odd view, given the history of relations between Iraqi and Iranian Shiites, which have been defined by suspicion, animosity, and envy more than brotherly love. Still, it persists.

Deeply scarred by Baathist rule and savage insurgent Sunni attacks, and well aware of the disastrous economic state of their religious brethren in southern Iraq, the Iraqi Shiite political establishment will likely give the Sunnis no more than what their numbers demand in parliament (and that may not be much). No matter what happens in the formation of a new government, the Shia are unlikely to increase state subventions to Sunni Arab paramilitary organizations—the anti-al Qaeda "Sons of Iraq" groups that the Americans want incorporated into the Iraqi Army and that the Shiite community deeply distrusts. The pre-election disqualification of some Sunni candidates was probably in part a bit of Shiite electoral hanky-panky against popular Sunni leaders, who may or may not have a bothersome Baathist background. But it was above all an assertion of Shiite determination that "never again" means "never again."

It's a strong bet that these disqualifications—which do not seem to have depressed Sunni participation—are highly popular among the Shia. Ahmad Chalabi, a leader of the National Alliance, whom the American press and Washington's top general in Iraq, Raymond Odierno, described as an Iranian-guided Beelzebub behind the effort to blacklist Sunni Arab candidates, undoubtedly

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*The Economic Impacts of the Oil and Natural Gas Industry on the U.S. Economy: Employment, Labor Income and Value Added, PricewaterhouseCoopers, September 2009 (Sponsored by API)
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gained in popularity among the Shia from the American onslaught against him. (It is astonishing to see American officials, who have before labeled Chalabi an Iranian agent only to see him rise like Lazarus, repeat the same mistake. Former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice and her aide Robert Blackwill had the excuse of near total ignorance of Iraq and Chalabi; General Odierno and Ambassador Christopher Hill should know better.)

But the Arab Sunnis will have peace—if they want it. There is absolutely no detectable desire among Iraq's Arab Shia for a renewed war against their Sunni compatriots. Even the Sadrists, who led the fiercest, vengeful death-squads against the Sunni community, give no hint that they want combat again with the Sunnis. (The same cannot be said when the Sadrists talk about Prime Minister Maliki, who led the army against them in Baghdad and in Basra.) The Sadrists have dropped the Shiite millenarian language that once scared the Sunnis. Moktada al-Sadr, exiled in Iran, is, as he probably knows, testing the historic Shiite idea of *gheibat*, "absence," where a spiritual leader disappears and then returns to lead the faithful. Democracy isn't kind to absentee politicians, which is, no doubt, why Sadr himself spread rumors of his return to Iraq. But neither he nor his movement is a threat to Iraqi democracy. The Sadrists still have some street power and passion and the possibility of a political impact if the plight of the Shiite poor worsens. But they are playing the democratic game. Only a renewed Sunni attack against the Shia will re-radicalize them.

The Shia won the Battle of Baghdad, and they are increasingly confident they could win any future war—much more decisively, thanks to American training of the Shiite-led Iraqi Army. Rather than give the Sunnis an equal share in government, which is what Sunni politicians really want, the Shia would probably fight. But there is likely considerable political wiggle room between Sunni revanchist dreams and Shiite stubbornness. The Sunni Arab community now has a political voice in the Iraqiya slate, headed by the long-time favorite son of the Central Intelligence Agency, the über-secularist and nominally Shiite Ayad Allawi. This is a much more potent, appealing, and flexible coalition than its predecessor, al-Tawafuq, which proved too lame, too religious, and too authoritarian. It's not clear now how Iraqiya could compromise sufficiently with the Kurds (Iraqiya's Sunni Arab core is vehemently opposed to Kurdish autonomy) or even with Maliki's party to gain real political power (Maliki, no less than Chalabi, is strongly opposed to de-de-Baathifica-

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tion and obviously doesn't care for putting more Sunni militiamen on the state payroll as soldiers).

But Shiites and Sunnis could work incremental deals. Public largesse could probably be increased for Sunnis. Not much, though, since Iraq still has very little cash in relation to the country's needs and the price of oil. Giving the Sunnis too much—considering that they are vastly better off than southern Shiites, parts of whose region look as if they just exited the Stone Age—would likely be political death for a Shiite politician. But small deals might be enough to keep Sunni elders content, if not thrilled. As Iraq's oil and gas revenues rise, as they will one of these days, that stress is likely to ease, and incremental gains could become substantial. And as odd as it might sound, Chalabi the patrician is more likely to help the process of Sunni-Shiite reconciliation than most other senior Shiite politicians, many of whose families were truly savaged by the Baath. Chalabi is an old-school Iraqi. He can wax (ahistorically) poetic about Iraq in the 1950s, before the Hashemite monarchy fell. That's a good thing. He has memories of Sunnis and Shiites in happier times, the movers and shakers of Iraq gathered around his father's dining room table and swimming pool. Like all patricians, he sees the world through families and a socially and intellectually complex matrix that does not discriminate rigorously by creed. Chalabi is never one to waste a political opportunity, but he is also a man of profound sentiment. His sentiments encompass Sunnis. With Shiite politicians, that is not always the case.

Election workers sort ballots in Karbala.

ASSOCIATED PRESS / AHMED AL-HUSSAINEY

The issue really is Sunni expectations. The March 7 elections raised them. Allawi did his side no favors by often suggesting that things could change dramatically under his leadership. The next few months will be telling as politicians come down to earth after the campaign. If the Sunnis can live with the fact that a democratic Iraq will always disappoint their clannish aspirations for political preeminence and a right to live off state subsidies, then Iraq's future is pretty bright. The Americans really ought to have one overwhelming goal: hang around. Not in large numbers. The drawdown of U.S. troops is a good idea. But we should view Iraq the same way we viewed postwar Germany, France, and Italy. The presence of American troops was the ultimate guarantor that those countries would not slip back into dictatorship.

Washington shouldn't choose sides in Iraq, and it shouldn't intervene in Iraqi politics except *in extremis*. But we do want to be there, in the background, as we were in Europe. Even Shiite politicians who vociferously oppose an American troop presence can privately suggest a more nuanced view. As the journalist Tom Ricks has suggested, American combat troops could be given a more anodyne label—stabilization forces, a support presence. Our training mission with the Iraqi Army and police is going to take years. Needless to say, most Sunnis will be thrilled. The problem will be with the Shia. We've not played Shiite politics brilliantly (as the stupid war against Chalabi demonstrates). But a constructive, unobtrusive U.S. presence is doable if the Obama administration handles the issue deftly.

If the White House really is worried that Iraq could become an Iranian satrapy, that's another reason for a small but potent U.S. military force to stay there. Iraqi democracy is a big deal. The American left and right, which have dismissed its evolution and belittled the American achievement in giving it birth, are stuck in the past, in an unchanging Middle East that never existed. What's happened in Iraq since 2003—and what's happened in Iran since last June 12—really ought to plant the possibility that the Islamic Middle East isn't a hopeless case. Some change there just might be progress. Accepting this will cause indigestion for those who've been unalterably attached to the image of post-Saddam Iraq as "the biggest strategic failure in American history" and who've denounced the pointlessness of promoting democracy "through the barrel of a gun." Unfortunately, Barack Obama once belonged to this group. But as president he has proven flexible in foreign affairs. With him, as with Iraq after another successful election—freer and more competitive than any election in the history of the Middle East—there are reasons to hope. ♦

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Dead Congress Walking

The Democrats are afraid of the voters and mad at each other. Their vaunted health care reform is going to do them in.

By Noemie Emery

A stranger moment in politics has seldom been seen. A vast expansion of government that affects every one of the country's 300-plus million inhabitants may be passed by a hair against fierce and fiercely repeated public opposition by a Congress that no longer speaks for its voters—most of whose members are angry and scared. They are afraid of their voters, and mad at each other, or rather, the Democrats are: The liberals are mad at the centrists, the centrists are mad at the liberals. Democrats in the House are angry at those in the Senate, and deeply suspicious of being betrayed. The centrists are also mad at Obama, for picking the wrong cause (health care and not the economy), doing it in the wrong way (big and expensive, not incremental and smaller), and pushing them to risk their careers in backing a cause and a program neither they nor their constituents want.

GARY LOCKE

For Obama himself, health care has been toxic, decimating his numbers, and ripping apart his mystique. In the course of the fight his approval ratings have dipped from near 70 to the mid-40s, his magic has vanished, and his words have gone flat. The coalition that elected him has fallen apart, as independents, mistakenly lured by his "conservative" temperament, have fled to the welcoming arms of the opposite party. Polling suggests that *all* the red and swing states Obama took from George W. Bush have now turned against him. The elections held since health care became the main issue have rendered votes of no confidence: In 2008, Virginia went to Obama by a 7-point margin; in 2009, it elected a Republican governor by 18, a 25-point recalibration. In 2008, New Jersey went to Obama by 15 points; in 2009 it went to Chris Christie by 4. Massachusetts, which went for Obama by 26 points (and which hasn't had a Republican senator since the late 1970s), gave Ted Kennedy's seat to a Republican who campaigned against health care, by a margin of 5 points. Respected nonpartisan political analysts now predict a "wave" election for the upcoming midterms, in which the out party wins one or both houses of Congress—an event that is usually driven by a major calamity like the failure of the Clinton health care reform plan in the 1994 midterms plus congressional scandal or the 2006 loss for Republicans, triggered by congressional scandal and what looked then like a loss in Iraq. Democrats hold massive majorities—18 seats in the Senate, and 79 in the House—but many of the states and districts that they represent now poll as being against the health care proposal, creating a major democratic dysfunction, as many members are voting against the wishes and interests of their districts and states. This lopsided body, in which Democrats are clawing to eke out even a one-vote majority, is a dead Congress walking, out of step with most of its voters,

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who on this issue at least are temporarily represented by the naysayers on the Republican side of the aisle. Health care reform has dissolved the Democrats' coalition, and with it much of their moral authority. If health care survives, it will have been passed by the shell of a Congress that outlived its own mandate.

Supporters of the current legislation on health care reform compare this effort to Social Security, Medicare, and the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of the mid-1960s, but the differences between them are stark. None of these passed with substantial majorities of the public strongly against them. None passed without substantial backing from the opposite party. None of them had the remarkable effect of uniting the opposition in monolithic resistance, while at the same time splitting their party, demoralizing it, and setting its various factions strongly at odds. Franklin Roosevelt and Lyndon Johnson never had to spend billions of dollars to pick up the votes of unhappy senators. Their stature was enhanced by passing these measures, not lessened and compromised. And their bills were passed on their merits, not on desperate appeals to save the party and president from a political pasting, which seems the main talking point being used on reluctant members of Congress now. "The crusade that is dragging itself toward the finish line doesn't quite feel like a triumph, let alone the launch of a new New Deal," wrote Howard Fineman in *Newsweek*, even before Scott Brown tossed his bombshell. "The reasons offered . . . have been ever-shifting. . . . By the time Bill Clinton met privately with Senate Democrats . . . it was . . . primarily about the political optics: the need to pass something, anything, to avoid defeat." "Their sole remaining reason for completing the damned thing is that they started it," writes George Will, noting that the main passion driving Democrats is a fear of repeating the 1994 wipeout, which they trace, perhaps incorrectly, to the failure to pass health care that year. At any rate, the main emotion among Democrats seems to be a balance of terror: fear of passing the bill against fear of killing it, making them face the wrath of the voters; or their party's base, leaders, and president.

No party or president has ever put its members in a vise of this nature before. Or seen its backers make so many strange statements in trying to press a bill's case. Back in the days before Scott Brown's victory, when the Democrats still had their 60-man supermajority, the claim was that the fault lay in the "system" and the Senate, and never in the bill. "What precisely is the point of the United States Senate?" asked *New York* magazine's John Heilemann. "If a popular, shrewd president coupled with a Congress with a strong majority in both houses held by the president's party can't get its program passed . . . something is structurally wrong." What was wrong, however, wasn't the structure. The president was not in fact shrewd and was no longer popular, the party wasn't strong but split (at least on this issue), and the bill was disliked by much of the public, which made its objections often and noisily felt.

As for the Senate, it is a more representative body than Obamacare's defenders believe. In many states having two Democratic senators, the health care bill polls very poorly; indicating not that the Senate rules give the minority too much power, but that in many states represented by Democrats, the senators aren't giving voice to their voters' ideas. Virginia, which has two Democrats (James Webb and Mark Warner), strongly opposes the president's version of health care and gave Republican Bob McDonnell a landslide in the governor's race to drive home the message. New Jersey, with two Democrats (Frank Lautenberg and Robert Menendez), elected Republican Chris Christie governor to make the same point. Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas is in very deep trouble, as is her fellow Democratic senator, Nebraska's Ben Nelson, who, when he got the Cornhusker Kickback, was jeered and hissed roundly by resident voters, and saw his numbers plummet. Massachusetts, which between 1978 and 2010 had no Republican senators at all in its delegation, and for eight years had no Republican members of Congress, elected Republican Scott Brown, on a pledge to fight health care. In this sense, John Kerry, Paul Kirk, and even Ted Kennedy, didn't represent Massachusetts. The woes of the health care reform are not the fault of the Senate at all.

Another strange view now being floated is that the public in general is angry because the bill is held up in Congress, and nothing is now being done. Let's back up and break this down into two different segments: The liberal base is angry because the bill is being tied up in Congress. The public in general is furious because the bill is still being brought up at all. If the bill is passed, the base will be pleased, but the public at large will be even more furious. And at the last calculation, the public in general was about three times as large as the base. A similar view is that the bill has to pass *because* it's unpopular, because it's only after its passage that its merits can be fully discussed. In this sense, the debate in itself is the primary obstacle. "We have to pass the bill, so that you can find out what is in it, away from the fog of the controversy," says Nancy Pelosi. "Once they pass a plan, you can actually talk about a plan," says E. J. Dionne. "No president can win the argument over health care prospectively because the country is not inclined to believe that Washington can reform a system this complex," Ron Brownstein quotes White House flack Dan Pfeiffer. "The only way to sell comprehensive reform, Pfeiffer continued, is to pass it despite poor poll numbers, and then build support." Usually, one builds

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support before voting, and then votes when one has it. But these are unusual times.

Strangest of all is the popular theory that if the bill passes—by bribes, threats, and payoffs, and against fierce opposition—there will be a triumphant, Rose Garden signing, and then the whole issue will fade. Good luck with that. A bill forced through against such popular dissent is likely to start, and not settle, contention, for two big reasons.

First, this bill is not only disliked, it is disliked intensely, and across a wide swath of the population. Majorities not only dislike it, but majorities of those majorities dislike it intensely. Twice as many independents dislike as support it intensely, and the intensity of antipathy has only grown. They dislike it intensely because it will affect them intensely, on a personal level. Tax cuts don't affect everyone equally. Very few people are ever on welfare. Most people who live long enough do get on Medicare, but not everyone does at the same time. Health care involves everyone, every day, on an emotional, primitive, life and death level. Everyone needs doctors. Everyone has had an experience, or has friends and relations who have had the experience, where the right or wrong medical treatment at the right or wrong time by the right or wrong doctor made the difference between life and death, between a full and a partial recovery, and an experience that was neither traumatic nor financially ruinous, or one that was hell on all counts. Everyone fears a system that could give them the wrong doctor instead of the right one at just the wrong moment, and everyone, no matter how rich, strong, well-connected, or seemingly healthy, knows that an accident or a bad diagnosis can come any day. Polls show that most people believe this plan will make their care more expensive, and at the same time, less satisfactory than what they already have. Add to this the fact that the bill by necessity trips a mare's nest of hot wires—abortion, rationing, euthanasia on the basis of "social utility," and the whole moral complex of beginning- and end-of-life issues—and one has no reason for thinking this issue will be laid to rest soon.

Second, the bill's defenders say "process" themes don't move the public, and they may be right. But what they call "process" in this case reads like "corruption" to others, such as the bribes, threats, and buyoffs with which the bill cleared the Senate. Three hundred million dollars to buy Mary Landrieu, over a billion to pay off Ben Nelson. Besides being corrupt, the administration is looking inept in the bargain: The past week brought Massapiece Theatre, along with the wavering Democratic congressman whose brother was offered a judgeship just as he was being asked to the White House for a collegial talk. This is beginning to look like *The Godfather* crossed with a Marx Brothers movie, a bad sign for an administration that came in touting competence and projecting the feel of a Frank Capra film.

In fact, the process is part of the problem, and stems from the bill's weakness, which makes payoffs essential: "Because the legislation is frightening and unpopular, Democrats have had to resort to serial bribery," writes George Will, correctly. "Massachusetts voted immediately after the corruption of exempting, until 2018, union members from the tax on high value" insurance plans. This and the Cornhusker Kickback helped fuel Scott Brown's upset, which created the need for still more extravagant buyoffs: Each bribe makes the bill more unpopular, creating the need for more bribes. Senate rules may bore voters, but they find this arresting—one reason the strife will go on.

No reform bill on this grand scale has ever passed in the face of such opposition, with solid majorities so firmly against it, with no votes at all from the opposite party, and with the party in power so split.

Other big bills may have been controversial, but most passed in the end by comfortable margins. No reform bill on this grand scale has ever passed in the face of such opposition, with solid majorities so firmly against it, with no votes at all from the opposite party, and with the party in power so split. No such bill had an organized opposition—the tea party movement—in place against it, ready to march at the first opportunity. Opposition to health care has been very good to the Republican party, and as long as it is, the party will use and run on it. Legal challenges from the states, already in progress, will also add to the air of contention. This is a war that could go on for years.

Liberals say Democrats have to pass this bill to prove they can govern. But will the public see wasting a year on something that's not a priority, then pushing a bill they don't want through multiple payoffs, and ending up with something they think will make their lives worse as a species of "governing" they want anything more to do with? Meanwhile, the Democrats are in the intensive care unit, their president wounded, their members demoralized, their coalition in tatters. Come November, voters may decide they'd rather be much less "governed"—or governed by somebody else. ♦

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Can Cameron Lose?

Appeasing the media has reduced the Tory strategy to the twin pillars of inoffensiveness and not being Labour.

By Andrew Stuttaford

For a country to have its currency marked down against the Zimbabwean dollar is not generally a good sign. But that is what has been happening to Britain this year. And it got worse in the immediate aftermath of an early March opinion poll showing that the governing Labour party had pulled to within 2 percentage points of the Conservatives. For quite a while now, there's been a widespread assumption—backed by opinion polls, local election results, the 2009 vote for the EU parliament, and the feeling that enough was enough—that the Tories after 13 years out of power would win a decent majority in the general election due no later than June.

That wasn't unreasonable. The U.K. has been wrecked by Labour. For Britons to give Gordon Brown a new term would be about as sensible as Pharaoh inviting the locusts back for another snack. The Conservatives meanwhile had been given a fresh lick of paint by David Cameron, the young (43), loudly modernizing politician who took over the Tory leadership in 2005. They were revived. They were ready. What could go wrong?

Well, Cameron suddenly has a shot at being Britain's Thomas Dewey. That March poll was just the most dramatic of a series showing that the robust Tory lead of last year—usually well into double digits—had dwindled to a toss-up.

JASON SEILER

Thanks to the peculiarities of the U.K.'s electoral system, the Conservatives need to be around 10 points ahead of Labour to achieve the sort of parliamentary majority that they will need if they are to form a workable government. Not only would a 2-point lead not do the trick, it would actually result in Labour being the largest party in the House of Commons and, almost certainly, holding onto power.

The most common expectation of the chattering classes is now of a "hung parliament" in which the Conservatives would win the most seats, but fall short of an absolute majority. They still might be able to form a minority government, but it would be a weak, fragile thing, and in no position to do what needs to be done to restore Britain's battered finances. The uncertainty that this would bring may spook the markets even more than a clear Labour win. A reelected Labour government ought at least to have the authority needed to tackle a budget deficit that threatens to set the bailiffs on Blighty. It might even use it.

But if international investors were alarmed by the turn in the polls, they were equally bewildered. To outsiders, not least in the United States, the thought that Gordon Brown could be allowed to continue in office beggars belief. That he might highlights just how much the reality of British politics differs from the fond Atlanticist myth. That reality is the reason David Cameron, new Tory, has done what he has done. It's the reason he may yet fail.

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The roots of America's attachment to the free market and to individual liberty may be traced back to the sceptr'd isle, but the Old Country is today a nation of the center-left and has been for over six decades. Class resentment, greater respect for authority, the all too visible failures of British capitalism, and intellectual and physical proximity to the continent, have all helped push the U.K. in a direction very far from Adam Smith's ideal, a process buttressed by the institutions, habits, and ways of thinking put in place by Labour after its landslide victory in 1945.

Browbeaten by memories of the scale of that defeat, postwar Tory governments preferred to focus their efforts on the more efficient management of the social democratic state rather than its replacement. That began to change with the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, but it's telling how close that happy day came to never dawning.

Bought and paid for by the trade unions and blinkered by ancient leftist ideology, the Labour government of the 1970s presided over soaring inflation, penal taxation, rising unemployment, and endemic industrial disorder. Its crowning humiliation (there are many choices) was the moment it was compelled to go cap-in-hand to the IMF for a bailout in 1976. Despite all this, it might have won reelection had it gone to the polls in 1978—a fact that should make David Cameron shudder. Mercifully, Prime Minister James Callaghan blinked, and the strikebound "winter of discontent" was enough to hand Mrs. Thatcher a solid, if unspectacular win the next year. Her later majorities were far more substantial but, thanks to splits on the left side of the political fence, they were exaggerated by similar electoral dynamics to those that now operate against the Tories. She never won more than the 44 percent of the popular vote she received in 1979 (her narrowest victory in terms of parliamentary seats, incidentally), a showing that may explain why her reforms were more cautious and incremental than hagiographers now like to claim.

Britain is today a nation of the center-left and has been for over six decades. That's the reason David Cameron has done what he has done. It's the reason he may fail at the polls.

Her successor, John Major, had a less-successful unfortunate encounter with the realities of a center-left nation. While his government made more than the usual number of blunders, the extent of its 1997 defeat by Tony Blair's "New Labour" revealed a more profound phenomenon. It was almost as if the Tories had no legitimate role within the British body politic, a sensation magnified by extraordinarily antagonistic media coverage and the wholesale rejection of the Conservatives by the cultural elite, either highbrow or low. The journalist and novelist Robert Harris, a Blair supporter, reported with evident satisfaction in 1998 how he couldn't think of one single "important" British writer, film director, theater director, composer, actor, or painter ("apart from Lord Lloyd Webber") who was a Conservative.

Under the circumstances, it's no great surprise that the Tories have struggled ever since. Britain's natural center-left majority reasserted itself—bolstered by the favorable economy bequeathed to Labour by the Conservatives, basking in the approval of its amen corner in the media and benefiting from the assumption running through popular culture that there was something not quite acceptable about the Tories. Blair was also hugely helped by Britain's electoral arithmetic. In the 2005 election, for instance, Labour won some 35 percent of the vote, but took 55 percent of the seats. This was the period in which the candidacies of the three Conservative leaders to follow John Major were destroyed almost as soon as they began.

Basking in the memory of the Ronnie and Maggie show, and reassured by the continuing (if fraying) willingness of the U.K. to stand alongside the United States in battle overseas (Britain's still living martial tradition is one of the key respects in which it differs from its social democratic neighbors), many on the American right either don't know or prefer to downplay just how different things are across the pond. That makes it difficult for them to appreciate what Cameron has been trying to do.

To get a feel for the challenge he faced in 2005, imagine what it would be like to be a Republican politician in an America where the mainstream media dictated a largely unchallenged liberal political agenda but where there was no Fox News, no Tea Parties, no libertarians, Perotistas, Second Amendment vigilantes, Club for Growth types, religious rightists, Reagan Democrats, NASCAR folk, country music fans, and . . . well, you get the picture.

Cameron felt the only hope of getting his message out was to "decontaminate the brand." This meant tackling the media. And so he did—in a Winston Smith way. Two plus two did indeed add up to five. The caricature of the Tories as elderly, racist, reactionary bitter-enders was, Cameron implicitly conceded, true. He would, he said, put that right. The result was a slew of policies—some good, some bad—designed to show that the party had mended its ways. It was now younger, kinder, gentler, "compassionate" (yes, there were distinct echoes of the 1999 vintage George W. Bush in all this), and more inclusive. It was an approach epitomized by the Conservative leadership's ostentatious embrace (the party logo is now a tree) of environmentalism—the secular

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religion of the recycling classes of Middle England and a pervasive finger-wagging cult among Britain's showbiz "luvvies." And it worked. While the media (with the exception of sections of Fleet Street) and entertainment worlds remain almost entirely estranged from the Conservative camp, the hatred ebbed enough that the Tory message to the wider British public was no longer drowned out.

But appeasing the media in essence reduced the Tory strategy to the twin pillars of inoffensiveness and not being Labour. As the country careened into financial catastrophe and historic recession that ought to have been enough, especially against a government divided by infighting and led by a morose, uncharismatic figure with, as the phrase goes, "issues." But with the party very publicly remaking its image, this reticence has begun to look a lot like incoherence—a perception only amplified by signs of disorganization at the top of the Conservative hierarchy.

That this is an election that will revolve around the economy is, moreover, not the straightforward winner for the Tories that one might suppose. Debilitated by years of Labour misrule, Britain's economy was exhibiting severe signs of strain even before the financial meltdown. But the 2008 crisis provided a perverse alibi for Blair and Brown's bungling. The slump is not Labour's fault, you see, but the work of those wicked, overpaid bankers—sleek, pinstriped, prosperous predators who look a lot like the Tories of socialist legend. It's no great stretch for Brown to argue from there that the Great Recession is the logical consequence and conclusion of Thatcherism. And it will be no great stretch for many voters to agree. The problems with that analysis are complicated to explain in the course of an election campaign, especially for a party trying very hard not to appear disagreeable.

The 2008 crisis provided a perverse alibi for Blair and Brown's bungling. The slump is not Labour's fault, you see, but the work of those wicked, overpaid bankers—sleek, pinstriped, prosperous predators who look a lot like the Tories of socialist legend.

The Tories have to get over themselves. They need to pin the blame for the mess on Labour—where it largely belongs—but they also need to demonstrate that they have the competence and the ideas to manage Britain's way out of this jam. The last few weeks of the Conservative campaign have not been reassuring on the competence front.

The ideas haven't been too great, either. For all their talk of restoring a measure of control to the nation's finances, the Tories have spelled out relatively little in the way of expenditure cuts. That Cameron has also vowed to "protect" spending on the National Health Service, a cost that already represents around 18 percent of public expenditure and is set to rise higher, merely reinforces the idea that the Tories are not serious about the deficit. Yet Cameron really had no choice. To advocate cutting back the NHS is an act of political suicide in Britain. The NHS, a source of national pride for all its shortcomings, is the third rail of British politics, the great creation of Labour's postwar settlement, and a powerful mechanism forever pulling Britain's politics to the left and its people into ever deeper dependency on the state whether as employee (the NHS payroll is over 1.3 million strong) or patient.

Yet Britain's growing budgetary crisis (government debt is slouching towards 100 percent of GDP by 2014) presents the Tories with a conundrum. An austerity program will be essential, and it will be painful, particularly in a nation where so many work for the public sector. For the Tories to give more details of how they plan to come to grips with the budget deficit is essential if they are to be believed as offering a credible alternative to Labour's botching of the economy. At the same time, it could be electoral poison in a country where the (wildly exaggerated) "Thatcher cuts" of the 1980s still fester in political folklore.

Labour knows this. The government is doing everything it can to create the illusion that the U.K. can somehow muddle through this crisis without too much pain. Putting party before country, Chancellor of the Exchequer Alastair Darling has left spending plans broadly unchanged over the last year, a stance that owes more to political calculation than to the more respectable concern that domestic demand is too depressed for cuts now. That's a stance that could easily be reconciled with detailing plans for the more frugal future that the markets want to see, but this is not the course that Darling has taken. His pragmatic irresponsibility has been rewarded: An ICM poll earlier this month showed that when it comes to trust in their ability to handle the recession, the Tories' lead over Labour had fallen to 2 percentage points—down from 15 in October.

The sense that there is something missing from what the Conservatives are saying is not confined to the economy. Just take the example of immigration. One of the hallmarks of the Blair-Brown years has been the failure to control the U.K.'s borders, through negligence, indifference, and worse:

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Recently uncovered documents appear to suggest that some of the increase was the product of a deliberate effort to reshape the British population. The welcome mat was noticed. Immigrants have poured in a net annual rate that quadrupled between 1997 (the year of Blair's first election victory) and 2007, bad news for an overcrowded island wrestling with endemic (if often disguised) unemployment and a sometimes volatile multicultural mix. Unsurprisingly, this issue is a major source of unease to many Britons. According to a *Daily Mail*/BPIX poll of swing constituencies in early March, 45 percent of voters would be "more likely" to vote Conservative if the party were to take a tougher line on immigration, yet Cameron has said next to nothing on the topic. Reports last weekend that the leadership would no longer have any objections to Conservative candidates' using the I-word in their election literature show just how far things had been allowed to slide. To some critics, the reason for such hesitation, which is by no means confined to the immigration issue, is that the Tories are still preoccupied with fighting a battle they have already won: the fight to show that they are indeed no longer the nasty party.

But there are other critics with a different explanation. Cameron's policy shifts have won him few real friends among the Tory base. There is respect for his political skills and a grudging recognition that much of what he has done had to be done if the Conservatives were, after three consecutive general election defeats, ever to win power again. The party's right-wingers accept that their guys had their chance in the 2001 and the 2005 elections and that it didn't work out. They also know that British voters typically don't opt for parties where the divisions are too obvious. So, if through frequently gritted teeth, the right has gone along, soothed by the prospect of victory.

As that prospect fades, there's revived anxiety that Cameron is not, to borrow Mrs. Thatcher's phrase, "one of us." Are his attempts to drive the party in another direction as much a matter of conviction as of tactics? These fears have been boosted by a series of recent moves that made no electoral sense, or at the very least were evidence of a leadership that was badly out of touch.

They include an attempt by the Cameron clique (and it is a clique) to force local constituency associations to pick female parliamentary candidates through the use of women-only shortlists. This flew in the face of Tory meritocracy, made a mockery of Cameron's alleged commitment to grassroots politics, and risked alienating the activists who need to be enthused ahead of the hard slog of a general election campaign. Adding to the irritation on the right has been the leadership's refusal to use the obvious opportunity presented by the various Climategates to make clear that its commitment to Gore's war against climate change was not, contrary to earlier impressions, a blank check.

And then, inevitably, there's Europe. The decision last November by Cameron to renege on his "cast iron" pledge to hold, if elected, a referendum on the EU's Lisbon Treaty was logical (the treaty had since come into effect: A British rejection would not be enough to undo it) but dreadful politically. The Tory lead in the polls began to slide shortly thereafter. Making matters worse to a party and a country that is far from friendly to the EU's ever-expanding reach, in February it emerged that the Conservatives were sending Ken Clarke, the last serving senior Tory still in the grip of europhilia, on a discreet mission to Brussels. Its presumed purpose? To reassure the EU elite that the Conservatives were suitably housetrained.

Cameron is running on a program of—wait for it—"change." But the electorate is asking just what sort of change this would really be. While the Conservatives would be a considerable improvement on the sleazy and incompetent gang now running Britain, many voters suspect that voting for the Tories will simply mean swapping "progressive" rule by one metropolitan faction with that by another. This view has only been reinforced by the expenses scandals that have roiled parliament and shamed the entire political class. It's a reasonable bet that small nonestablishment parties will, along with "none of the above," increase their share of the vote this time round. Nevertheless, not being Labour is still probably going to be enough—just—to hand Cameron the keys to 10 Downing Street. After 13 years of Blair/Brown, too much sewage has flowed under Westminster Bridge for voters to want to risk giving Labour another go.

The problem for Cameron is that, in the absence of a massive financial crisis breaking between now and election day, his majority will be small. This will leave him vulnerable when things start to turn rough. And the U.K.'s desperate financial straits ensure that they will. Britain is already brutally taxed. Sooner rather than later the next prime minister will have to slash government spending, and he will have do so against a backdrop of high unemployment, sustained economic underperformance, and the rising opposition of a center-left nation. You can guess where the media will stand on all this.

Mrs. Thatcher found herself in a not dissimilar predicament within a year or so of taking office in 1979. Many of her senior colleagues panicked, but what saved her was the loyalty of much of the Conservative base, a base that the parliamentary party could not risk defying, however much they might want to. She, party loyalists knew, was one of them.

As things are currently going, they won't feel the same way about David Cameron in 2011. ♦

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Eboni Booth, Laurel Holland

JOAN MARCUS

Abortion in Demand

A tragedy with comic overtones

BY ROGER KIMBALL

New York

Do you know the story of how Cyril Connolly, the celebrated editor of *Horizon* in the 1940s, accepted a piece from a writer only to sit on it indefinitely? When the impatient scribe inquired about its fate, Connolly, in his best mandarin style, explained that while it was good enough to be accepted by *Horizon*, it was not good enough to be published by *Horizon*.

I wonder if the pooh-bahs at New Haven's Long Wharf Theatre had that story in the back of their minds when they commissioned Jonathan Reynolds's new play, *Girls in Trouble*, and then declined to stage it? "They were very brave about commissioning it," Reynolds noted in an interview, "but not so brave about actually doing it."

Girls in Trouble
by Jonathan Reynolds
The Flea Theater, New York

I have no idea whether Connolly was right to consign the work of that aspiring littérateur to oblivion. But having just seen *Girls in Trouble* at the Flea Theater here, I can say with confidence that the folks at Long Wharf made a grave error. *Girls in Trouble*, briskly directed by Jim Simpson, the Flea's artistic director, is the most thought-provoking (and also the funniest) play I've seen in New York since—well, since May 1997, when I saw (twice) *Stonewall Jackson's House*, Reynolds's razor-sharp play about race and political correctness.

Yes, yes, I know that every artist worth his state subsidy is supposed to be "provoking," "challenging," "transgressing," and otherwise assaulting the integument, proffering something mind-numbingly banal, fathomlessly unintelligible, or at least indescribably repulsive to chic audiences eager to crowd onto that increasingly vast playing field known as "the cutting edge." The limousines are backed up for blocks on opening nights at museums, theaters, and other cultural emporia as this season's *Wunderkinder* do for the herd of independent minds what candidate Obama did for Chris Matthews's leg.

But have you noticed that all that supposedly "transgressive" fare simply reinforces a set of liberal clichés about sex, race, capitalism, America, the moral character of corporations, the predilec-

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tions of religious figures (unless they hail from some certifiably disenfranchised religious group), "patriarchy," AIDS, Republicans, the environment, and last but not least, abortion? There's really only one possible opinion about all these subjects. Hamlet told his visiting thespians that the purpose of their art was "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." Our domesticated pseudo-radicals simply hold the mirror up in front of the reigning dogmas of the day. Their motto, like that of Holiday Inn, is "the best surprise is no surprise."

Jonathan Reynolds does not play this game. Which is why it took him nearly 12 years to find a theater willing to stage *Stonewall Jackson's House*. Write a play depicting Jesus having gay sex with Judas, as did Terrence McNally in *Corpus Christi*, and you're in like Flynn. Theaters up and down Broadway will be clamoring for your stuff. Seriously challenge the political orthodoxy on any hot-button issue, however, and it's back-of-the-bus time. *Stonewall Jackson's House* went on to be shortlisted for a Pulitzer Prize, which is perhaps why it took Reynolds only five years to find a venue for *Girls in Trouble*, on view at the Flea Theater in New York until March 21.

"What's frustrating," Reynolds acknowledged, "is that they won't fess up and say, 'I hate the politics of this play so I'm not putting it on.' Instead they say, 'Oh, the character's weak here,' or 'I don't believe this.' And maybe they're right. But my bet is they're worried about their board or the group they run with." I'll see that bet and raise you ten.

The Flea Theater is not what you would call a large house. I counted just over 40 seats in the basement performance space where the play is showing (there's another small theater upstairs). But the 14-year-old establishment does seem to live up to its announced goal: "To present distinctive work that raises the standards of Off-Off Broadway for artists and audiences alike." Members of its young resident troupe, The Bats, man the ticket counter and the bar, they're ushers, and they shuttle props on and off stage. No union rules here, which is one reason they're still in business. The actors, unpampered, throw themselves into their performances with rare energy and intelligence. It's the real thing.

In *Stonewall Jackson's House*, Reynolds said some unpalatable things about the miasma of political correctness that hovers over the theater world. Gasp. Titters. Did the black girl in period dress showing folks around the Stonewall Jackson house museum really just offer to go home with the gormless white couple to be their slave? Okay—but "We're not going to call you 'slave.' We'll call you an 'associate.'" Yikes. And that's just the beginning.

In *Girls in Trouble*, Reynolds tackles another impossible subject: abortion. The play is in three acts. The first act shows two college kids, Hutch (Andy Gershenzon) and Teddy (Brett Aresco), hurtling down Interstate 71 outside Cleveland at one in the morning. It's 1962, a couple of years after the FDA approved the Pill, a decade before *Roe* v. *Wade*. Passed out in the backseat is Barb (Betsy Lippitt), a few months' pregnant, one of the many girls Hutch has bedded, to the intense admiration and envy of Teddy. They're looking for an abortionist in a seedy "colored neighborhood" and they're late. They need to hurry because Barb has to be back first thing to take her econ final.

Reynolds excels in wrapping raw truths in the sugar of humor. The exchanges between Hutch and Teddy about sex; the scene in which Hutch has cursory, vertical sex with Barb in order to cajole her into having the abortion ("Jesus, what you have to do sometimes"); the scenes with Sandra (Akyiaa Wilson), the former Army nurse turned abortionist, and her seven-year-old daughter Cindy (Eboni Booth)—all are both brutal and hilarious.

"How, how do you do it?" asks Hutch. "Massage the uterus," Sandra explains. "Induce a miscarriage." Hutch to Teddy a bit later: "Where is the uterus?" Cindy, who sneaks downstairs to play with her newborn kittens, seems at first to offer a humanizing touch to the tawdry scene. Then one of the kittens bites her, and she casually snaps its neck and lets it drop to the floor. So much for that little life.

Fast forward two decades. It's 1983. A lot has changed in America. The sexual revolution has swept the country. So has the feminist revolution, one of many things that proved that "free love" would turn out to be an oxymoron that tendered an expensive tab. Act II is brief, maybe 15 minutes. The whole thing is devoted to a sort of rap monologue by "Sunny," the little girl Cindy 20 years on. She's fallen for Danny, aspiring electronics entrepreneur, who seems to have gone off her a bit. This has made Sunny bitter. "Who's got the power now, dog? I do—women do. We got the law on our side." Sunny's just discovered she's pregnant. Danny is delighted: He wants to marry her and dreams of walking his child to school. Sunny is not so sure:

> If I decide and me and me alone to have Danny Junior or Lucy—and ho, it's all up to me—I could deestroy your life. For twenty-one years! You have to support this kid for twenty-one years if I tells you to, that's the law! . . . Ha ha ha—you gonna pay for not lovin' me. You won't get to high profilin', Mr. Radio Shack, you be lucky to be a salesdog at Radio Shack when you're 50!

Eboni Booth gives a mesmerizing performance as Sunny, aided not a little by a brilliantly written script. Reynolds has perfect pitch for the rap patter and street lingo, which he unfolds and elaborates like a virtuoso performing a Liszt cadenza. Act II ends with Sunny wailing that, since Danny doesn't love her, she'll abort the child: "My momma used to do abortions for a living back when it was illegal, nothin' to it, 'cept for that once. . . . And you think I won't do it? I snaps cats' necks."

Skip forward another 20 years. Act III—by far the longest of the play—opens to the emetic strains of the *All Things Considered* theme. "I'm Wellesley St. Louis St. Drem," says the radio voiceover, "and tonight on *All Things Considered* we'll look at just how awful the world is, why America made it that way, and the unmitigated success of apology in our foreign policy. But first, stay tuned for *The Virtuous Vegan*, with our favorite chef de cuisine, Amanda Stark [Laurel Holland]."

Ah, the Virtuous Vegan! I'm sure

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you know one or two. We're in Amanda's kitchen and immediately learn she's had a bad day. She was mowed down by a bicycle messenger, who dislocated her hip. In the emergency room, the doctor has alarming news. Not only was Amanda banged up, she was also knocked up: She's 25 weeks pregnant. Amanda instantly made an appointment to have an abortion the next day. She gets a call from an OB-GYN at the hospital who offers to come over and tell her about the strategies the hospital has to help celebrities like her avoid the paparazzi and nurses who might be stringers for the *National Enquirer*.

Well, the person who shows up turns out to be Cynthia, *née* Cindy, formerly Sunny, who married Danny after all. Danny is now sole owner of Home Theatres International, "bigger than Radio Shack." They have six children and Cynthia, supported in part by Danny's millions, is part of a pro-life group that goes about trying to convince women not to abort their babies. Her success rate thus far: one hundred percent.

The women go at it hammer, tongs, and kitchen knives when Amanda discovers that Cynthia is not the doctor she claimed to be. But then Amanda has the idea of inviting Cynthia onto her show as a guest. For it was not so much Amanda's meatless recipes that boosted her to stardom on NPR; it was her meaty recipe of mixing politics with cooking. "I loved it," says Cynthia, "when you had Bruce Willis on making that cactus frittata and in the process got him to reveal his right-wingery. And then julienned him like a cabbage." (Food obviously plays a starring role in Jonathan Reynolds's life: He wrote a cookery column for the *New York Times* for several years and, in his 2003 solo performance piece *Dinner with Demons*, he cooked a five-course meal onstage eight times a week.)

"Often the unknowns are better guests than the superstars," Amanda confides. "The one person I regret never getting was William F. Buckley. The one I can't get now is Christopher Hitchens."

The verbal *pas de deux* between Amanda and Cynthia is both coruscatingly funny and breath-stoppingly dramatic. The pro-life and pro-choice positions are advanced and parried with a seasoned debater's skill. Both actresses revel in their roles. And I should flag Eboni Booth's riveting demonstration that she was not carrying any concealed weapons. She convinced me, and I, sitting a mere 10 feet away, made a careful inspection.

I won't spoil the ending, which is shocking in about 27 different ways. The denouement leaves the viewer not with a tidy solution but a complicated, morally ambiguous knot—just as life is in the habit of doing.

The adjective "Shavian" occurs frequently in discussions of Jonathan Reynolds's work. Old Bernard was in many ways a crackpot; he was certainly a political ignoramus of the first water. But he was an effective playwright because he excelled in dramatizing difficult ideas—ideas, that is, that were difficult because they were at odds with his audience's prejudices and preconceptions.

Reynolds is indeed Shavian in this sense. In articles and interviews, he is invariably described as "conservative" or listing rightwards. I have no idea about the nature of his personal political convictions. But *Girls in Trouble* is not a conservative play. For one thing, Mrs. Grundy would be distinctly displeased at its exuberant deployment of four-letter words and the acts they describe. But *Girls in Trouble* will be denounced as conservative because it does not pay homage to the illiberal "liberal" pieties that are regnant in our culture, including our theatrical culture. Particularly inexcusable, of course, is its complex but largely sympathetic presentation of a committed and articulate pro-lifer. What an outrage!

"I thought progressives were supposed to be so open to new ideas," Cynthia says to Amanda. It is part of Jonathan Reynolds's accomplishment to show us just how closed that vaunted openness can be. ♦

B&A

Journey's Ending

A victory lap for the poet laureate of the road.

BY THOMAS SWICK

In Key West once I ran into Jan Morris power-walking down Duval Street. It was a balmy January morning, and she was dressed in a T-shirt and shorts. I recognized her immediately because I had interviewed her a few days earlier at the local literary festival. She had floored me with her thoughtfulness, graciously giving her time to everyone who requested it and then apologizing profusely for keeping me waiting.

Contact!
A Book of Encounters
by Jan Morris
Norton, 208 pp., $23.95

So I didn't think twice about interrupting her walk. She kindly stopped and we chatted breezily in front of St. Paul's Church. Hoping to impress her with my travel writer savvy, I mentioned that I occasionally attended church abroad, on the theory that you sometimes met interesting people at the coffee hour. (In Porto, Portugal, I was served port.) She looked at me somewhat skeptically, and expressed a preference for the company of pagans. Then she continued on her way, striding past the tourists as if carrying the news of the ascent of Mount Everest.

This encounter does not appear in *Contact!* (it was understandably more memorable for me than it was for

Thomas Swick is the author, most recently, of A Way to See the World: From Texas to Transylvania with a Maverick Traveler.

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her), but it represents the type of brief moment in time of which this book is a rich compendium.

Contact! consists of pieces, not in the sense of collected essays, but actual pieces: vignettes, sketches, prose poems, word pictures. They recall a line of Nicolas Bouvier, that a traveler's life is one of "stolen moments, reflections, minute sensations, chance discoveries and odds and ends."

Throughout her career—first as James, then as Jan—Morris has been the master of the travel essay, roaming the globe and capturing the spirit of places with elegant prose and inspired aperçus. These essays were inevitably gathered between covers to join her acclaimed single-subject books on personal touchstones like Venice, Hong Kong, Manhattan, Sydney (she has an unapologetic love of cities), and Wales (she is at the same time a proud Welsh patriot). She declared her previous book, *Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere*, to be her last, so *Contact!* comes as an unexpected and delightful encore.

It has no thematic, chronological, or geographical order. We move from Magdalen College, Oxford, to Jerusalem's Church of the Holy Sepulchre (though not the coffee hour) to Schwab's Drugstore in Hollywood, where "elderly widows of émigré directors reminisce about Prague over their breakfasts." A somewhat faded air, as that line suggests, hangs wonderfully over some of these pieces, which clamor with monks and dons, sultans and servants, brigadiers and cowboys—people who have not necessarily disappeared from the scene but who have somehow slipped from most writers' purviews.

Each slice of life is short, rarely filling a page. In length they resemble blog posts, but in substance they are artful miniatures, packing description, insight, humor, pathos, and surprise into a ridiculously circumscribed space. In fact, *Contact!* would make a wonderful gift for the blogger in your family. Already on page 11 we are introduced to "one of the more endearing hazards of modern travel, the Student of English." This particular one, in Esfahan, accosts the author to ask if it's "permissible . . . to pursue a gerund with a participle." Turning the page we're attending a legislative session of the Canadian Northwest Territories and watching a playful teenage page of mixed blood bring "a breath of the woods inside."

COLIN MCPHERSON / GETTY IMAGES

Jan Morris (foreground), Morris Minor, 2007

In 1989, Morris published a collection of rather longer memories, *Pleasures of a Tangled Life*; this one could have been titled *Pleasures of an Observant Life*. In Odessa, she plumps us into seats at the Opera and Ballet Theater, where "in the half-empty auditorium, a constant buzz of homely conversation underlies the score . . . while the cast of *La Traviata* smile resolutely across the footlights with a treasury of gold teeth."

An elderly man in Edinburgh disappears "into the malty shadows" of his pub, and at West Point, on a Saturday afternoon, a female cadet spots her father. "She broke into a run, her cap went askew for a moment, and into his strong American arms she fell."

Great writers, of course, do more than observe; they make something of their observations. At the airport in Toronto, Morris spots "a middle-aged woman in a fur hat and a long coat of faded blue, held together by a leather belt evidently inherited from some earlier ensemble. She was burdened with many packages. . . . If she was not hurling questions at expressionless bystanders in theatrically broken English, she was muttering to herself in unknown tongues, or breaking into sarcastic laughter." A little farther down we read: "I lost sight of the lady as she passed through customs . . . but she represented for me the archetypal immigrant, arriving at the emblematic immigrant destination of the late twentieth century, and I watched the confrontation with sympathy for both sides."

In her life and work, Morris has made kindness her guiding ideal, so she is naturally drawn to it in others (the Portuguese, Texans). But a worldly tolerance is extended to almost everyone here: functionaries, beggars, tourists (whom professional travelers often love to denounce), a Greek flasher, and even her imagined masticators. "Their forebears used to be cannibals," she writes, "but I would not mind being eaten in Fiji. The pot would be spiced, the cooking gentle, and the occasion in most ways merry."

In fact, in addition to being an excellent guide for bloggers, *Contact!* is, through example, a marvelous how-to book. We learn (albeit a little late) how to deal with the Soviets: You tell your Intourist guide, as Morris did, that she's being "unkind." (Then her

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Russian emotions spill forth.) How to endure French superciliousness: You embrace it for the stately Gallic constant it is. And of course, we learn how to travel: forever alert, amenable, and understanding.

Which is not to say naïve. Paying a visit to Gamal Abdel Nasser, Morris finds the Egyptian president gracious and welcoming, but remembers that "he had talents of deception and conspiracy of a very high order." Nasser is one of a few famous people who drop into these pages: King Hussein of Jordan, Francis Gary Powers (who, at his trial "was obviously frightened, and so was I"), Adolf Eichmann, Yves Saint-Laurent ("the Frenchest person I ever met"), Harry Truman, Tenzing Norgay seen coming down Everest with "a smile that illuminated the glacier" one day before becoming "one of the most famous men on earth."

Though it is not mentioned here, James Morris was the reporter who sent the news of Norgay's and Edmund Hillary's conquest of Everest to the *London Times*, thus becoming (at least in journalistic circles) famous himself. The passage is indicative of the book's rare and oblique autobiographical glimpses. There is a charming story about a daughter who, on a childhood visit to Brittany, saw an old woman smiling beatifically from a window and declared, "I want that lady." A dramatic description of the National Eisteddfod, "the great cultural festival of the Welsh nation," ends with the news that the poetry prize that year was taken by the author's son Twm.

Set off by itself on page 91—dividing the book as it did her life—is "A Snatch of Sound in Morocco," the country to which James traveled in 1972 for his sex change operation. The night before the procedure the music of a street flute floated up to his room and he perceived it as "flights of angels."

Morris has lived an almost unfathomably comprehensive life—crossing borders of gender as well as geography—and as yet another book shows, she has been tireless, cheerful, and brilliant in describing it. ♦

B&A

The Finlandian

The composer whose name and homeland were indistinguishable. **BY GEORGE B. STAUFFER**

On a wintry day in January 1920, Alf Klingenberg, the recently appointed director of the newly formed Eastman School of Music in Rochester, offered Jean Sibelius a position as professor of composition. Klingenberg wanted to make a bold move that would mark the young school as a music conservatory of distinction, one with a European pedigree. Klingenberg explained to Sibelius that he would "teach composition to the up-and-coming geniuses in America." At the same time he assured him that "the number of those will certainly not make your workload too heavy."

Sibelius
A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland
by Glenda Dawn Goss
University of Chicago, 549 pp., $55

Sibelius was 54 and at the peak of his fame. He had composed *Finlandia*, numerous symphonies, a greatly admired violin concerto, and many other works. He was known as the father of Finnish music and hailed in his homeland as a national hero. It was Sibelius, after all, who had helped to shape the culture of the emerging nation that had proclaimed its independence from Russia just three years before. His picture was displayed in homes, shops, and institutions throughout Finland. His music was performed throughout the world. Who could possibly be in a better position to put the Eastman School on America's cultural map?

Sibelius considered the matter for a year before cabling Klingenberg "Yes" in January 1921. But then he wavered. Friends urged him to stay true to his country and not squander his energies on "young Americans," in an environment that was both "strenuous and inartistic." His British supporter and early biographer Rosa Newmarch, in particular, discouraged him from entering into the wilds of the New World. In the end, Sibelius reversed himself, declined Klingenberg's offer, and remained "a good patriot" (as he himself expressed it), living out the remaining 37 years of his life at his country villa, where he died in 1957 at the age of 91.

But the steady flow of works ceased soon after the Eastman decision. Sibelius lapsed into bouts of depression and drunkenness that resulted in one of the longest and most famous periods of compositional silence in music history. Charles Ives abruptly stopped composing in 1918 at age 53, telling his wife, Harmony, that "nothing sounded right." He lived for another 27 years. Gioachino Rossini stopped writing operas in 1829 at the age of 37, just after the immense success of *William Tell*. He lived for another 39 years. But it is Sibelius's retreat into the Finnish woods, at the height of his international popularity, that has caught the imagination of modern music historians. What caused such creative angst—angst that seems to have been exorcized only by the ritualistic burning of unfinished pieces in front of his wife in the 1940s? What produced Sibelius's grand compositional funk?

Getting to the bottom of this mystery is the goal of this magisterial new book. Glenda Dawn Goss, former editor in chief of the Sibelius critical edition, states from the outset that her objective is to unearth the roots of the composer's withdrawal from the world, which she believes can be found in the cultural

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changes that took place in Finland during the century that led up to the Russian Revolution and the subsequent liberation of Finland. "To understand Sibelius, to try to fathom the mystery of his lost creativity, mortifyingly played out on an international stage, requires understanding more fully the world from which he came," she writes in the introduction. She accomplishes this through a fascinating study of Finnish culture and politics, devoting 442 pages, 32 figures, 12 plates, and an extensive research apparatus to the task of putting us in Sibelius's dandified shoes (no native clogs for this Scandinavian, we quickly learn). While psychobiographies of composers have become increasingly popular in recent years (one thinks of Maynard Solomon's studies of Mozart and Schubert), Goss provides instead a cultural biography, a genre that seems entirely appropriate for a nationalistic composer such as Sibelius.

The basic signposts of his life are well known. Born the son of a military physician in 1865, he showed a natural affinity for music. He began piano at age nine before moving to violin and composition, and after a brief flirtation with law studies, enrolled in the Helsinki Music Institute, where he majored in violin and composition. Additional study in Berlin and Vienna led to the composition of his first great work, *Kullervo*, an immense, sprawling symphonic poem based on a tale from the Finnish folk epic, *Kalevala*. Completed in 1892, it made Sibelius an instant national hero at age 27.

Kullervo was followed by an extensive series of Finnish works—*En Saga*, *Lemminkäinen's Return*, *The Swan of Tuonela*, and many others, often employing the locally popular male chorus and texts from the *Kalevala*. Then in 1900 came his nationalist *pièce de résistance*, *Finlandia*. Granted an annual stipendium by the Finnish senate, Sibelius built a rustic country villa, Ainola, in Järvenpää near Lake Tuusula, and in 1904 settled into a quiet life in the forest with his wife, Aino, and their children. He remained there the rest of his life. Although Sibelius wrote symphonies for orchestra in an effort to win international recognition, it was the works on Finnish legend that earned him an adulation within his country rarely accorded living composers. The Helsinki Institute was renamed in his honor, a postage stamp bearing his likeness was issued, and his birthdays were celebrated as state events.

Jean Sibelius, 1949

KEYSTONE FEATURES / GETTY IMAGES

Lurking behind Sibelius's success was a national identity crisis, however. As Goss points out, Finland in the 19th century was a land of clashing cultures. A Swedish territory from the 13th century to 1809, Finland could not easily shake the deeply entrenched influence of Sweden's linguistic, religious, and political traditions. Finnish may have been the language of the people, but Swedish was the principal means of scholarly and written communication. The intelligentsia and leaders of the Finnish freedom movement (including Sibelius) came from Swedish-speaking households, and the Lutheran heritage of the 16th-century Swedish monarch Gustav Vasa, who embraced the Reformation from his throne in Stockholm in 1527, remained fully in force. Indeed, the influence of the Lutheran church, via Swedish liturgical rites, can be seen in the chorale-like main theme of *Finlandia*.

Finland became a grand duchy of the Russian empire in 1809 after the successful invasion of Alexander I during the Napoleonic Wars. It was ruled benevolently and granted considerable autonomy—so much that Finns affectionately expressed allegiance to the czars until the 1890s, when Russia began to impose stricter control. True Finnish culture emerged only in the 19th century in the midst of this Swedish-Russian mélange, with a national "awakening" spurred by native developments in art, music, and literature. The literary epics of Finland—the "Pillars of Finnish Identity," as Goss puts it—that provided the subjects and images for the country's nationalistic artists and musicians were not written until the Russian period with the blessing of czars, who viewed the development of native culture as anti-Swedish. *Kalevala*, Elias Lönnrot's collection of national legends; *Tales of Ensign Stål*, Johan Ludvig Runeberg's passionate patriotic poetry with images of "pure" country life; and *The Book of Our Land* and *Scènes historiques*, Zachris Topelius's series of children's stories, were issued between 1835 and 1875. Only the first was written in Finnish; the others were in Swedish.

Sibelius was caught in the cultural crossfire. He relied heavily on these

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newly created Finnish myths for many of his most important musical works, which were premiered at political lotteries and tableaux of native culture. But by the time the nationalist movement reached its peak in the first decade of the 20th century, most Finns had moved beyond the dark and misty legends of the *Kalevala* to more practical concerns, such as governmental and social reform. Independence did not bring peace but rather a five-month civil war in 1918. Sibelius, who based so many of his works on *Kalevala* tales, seemed frozen in bronze, unable to adjust to 20th-century realities.

Take his defining masterpiece, *Kullervo*, for instance. The text is drawn from Cantos 31-36 of the *Kalevala*, which describe the maraudings of Kullervo, a bloodthirsty young fighter. While collecting taxes for his father, Kullervo takes advantage of a young woman who turns out to be his sister. She commits suicide, and he leaves for battle. One day, years later, he finds himself in the woods where the violation occurred. Kullervo talks to his sword, inquiring what kind of blood it would like to taste. The sword says the blood of a guilty man, whereupon Kullervo eviscerates himself with the blade.

"Men do not laugh in the *Kalevala*," Goss reminds us, and then cites Arnold Bax's observation that Sibelius "gave the impression of never having laughed in his life." While the somber tales of the *Kalevala* enthralled Finns in the 1880s and '90s, their appeal faded in the new century. Nor did they translate well to the outer world: *Kullervo* was never performed outside Finland during Sibelius's lifetime. Unlike Bach's Mass in B-Minor, with its universal Latin text, or Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, with its broad message of worldwide brotherhood, *Kullervo* addresses issues of myth that are of interest mainly to Finns, who seem ready to contemplate the nefarious undertakings of legendary forebears during the long nights of the Nordic winter. Few outside Finland appear willing to take the time and trouble to study the text of *Kullervo* to understand how it is enhanced by Sibelius's meandering but remarkable 80-minute score.

Sibelius and his wife on his ninetieth birthday

BETTMANN / CORBIS

To make matters worse, Sibelius remained committed to a conservative musical language, the tonal idiom of Wagner, Brahms, and other Romantic composers. By the second decade of the 20th century the three other S's—Schoenberg, Scriabin, and Stravinsky—were introducing progressive forms and idioms that would have a global impact on musical language. Sibelius seemed hopelessly provincial by comparison, and he was painfully aware of the fact. As Alex Ross notes in his marvelous overview of 20th-century music, *The Rest Is Noise*, Sibelius confessed in his diary that "not everyone can be an 'innovating genius'" and hoped that he would have a "small, modest place" in history.

The plight of Sibelius and other nationalist composers is nowhere clearer than in the realm of the symphony, which reigned as the supreme measure of musical stature in the 19th century. One could write virtuosic piano sonatas, witty quartets, or charming songs, but the symphony stood as the ultimate test of greatness. In this instrumental world, Beethoven at the beginning of the century and Mahler at the end set the gold standard, creating immense, highly integrated, architectonic symphonies against which all other large musical works were judged. Schumann and Brahms delayed writing symphonies until they were well advanced in their careers. Schubert feared competing directly with Beethoven and, in his last years, experimented with an innovative, highly lyrical type of work that resulted in an extended series of incomplete symphonies, of which the famous "Unfinished" is but one.

Sibelius fully recognized the problem and, like Schubert, tried to find a new way. Instead of writing works with a straightforward classical structure, he turned instead to creating symphonies that act as vast musical landscapes, with themes and transitions that float before the listener like states of mind. But by the time Sibelius began issuing symphonies in 1899, he was so firmly linked with the Finnish national awakening that even his abstract works were given patriotic programs. As Goss points out, commentators explained the perplexing, rapid mood changes of the Second Symphony by assigning it a patriotic program relating to Finland's drive for independence. One writer gave it the epithet "Finland's Struggle for Freedom" and labeled its four movements "Development before the Conflict," "The Storm," "National Resistance," and "Free Fatherland." This may have won favor among the Finns, but it held little meaning abroad. Even in America, critics viewed the music of the Second Symphony as "gruesome" and "neurotic," with too

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much "meaningless repetition." At best, they praised its "attractive weirdness," and even Olin Downes, a strong Sibelius supporter, pronounced it "gloriously rude." In light of such criticism, one can understand why Sibelius could not complete the Eighth Symphony, which he labored over for years before finally abandoning. Here Goss speculates: If Sibelius had accepted the Eastman post in 1920 and had come to the Land of the (ideologically) Free, might matters have ended differently?

Sibelius's most successful instrumental work may be the Violin Concerto of 1904, with its classical forms and Mendelssohn-like features. Here the dazzling cadenzas, figurative passagework, and heroic themes overcome dark, brooding Finnish melancholia and divert the listener's attention from the less conventional formal aspects of the piece. The jury remains out on the symphonies, however, and they continue to spur spirited debate among Sibelius's supporters and detractors. Goss cites the German critic Julius Meier-Graefe on Finnish painting: "In Finland, art is a cry of oppressed self-confidence. We do not understand the pictures because we do not have time to read the *Kalevala* or the other Finnish epics."

That may be the central issue of the music of Jean Sibelius. Do we have the time, or interest, to fully understand it? ♦

B&A

Stunt Man

First a Coaster, then a falconer/central banker.

BY JOE QUEENAN

Ever since I read George Plimpton's *Paper Lion* in high school, I've been a huge fan of "stunt journalism." This is the type of feisty reportage where a writer tries out for a professional football team, or takes a crack at conducting a symphony orchestra, and then writes a lighthearted article about his experiences.

The trajectory of these stories never varies: Ever since he was a kid the writer always wondered what it would be like to (fly an F-16/belt out "Nessun Dorma" at La Scala/hand-feed famished tiger sharks); but now that he's finally gotten the opportunity to play (jai-alai/the viola da gamba/King Lear), he realizes how much talent and hard work go into (sumo wrestling/aesthetic dentistry/repossessing cars in Detroit). And so, he comes away from his experience with heightened respect for (wheelchair samurai/door-to-door Torah repairmen/one-armed baristas).

The authors of these articles always portray themselves as earnest klutzes, and never fail to describe the despair they felt when they couldn't get the *bandilleras* to stick in *el toro*'s flank, or when they realized they could never return Maria Sharapova's serve even if she was blindfolded and playing with a teacup. But at some point, there occurs the moment when the writer gloats that, while he would never be mistaken for Picasso or Mike Tyson, he still feels that he acquitted himself reasonably well in the Comedy Store/Ecole des Beaux-Arts/Navy Seals, and has nothing to be ashamed of.

Obviously, there is no way for the reader to ascertain whether this is true.

Over the years, I've done quite a few stunts of my own; in fact, it's long been a source of considerable income. I once spent an entire day impersonating Mickey Rourke; another passing myself off as Hugh Grant in South Philly; and spent another ordering Frappucinos at Starbuck's while dressed up as Yoda. I also attended a crash course in Vermont in an effort to realize my lifelong goal of passing myself off as a falconer. I rehearsed for three months before doing a stand-up comedy routine at The Improv in New York; consulted with Frank Caliendo and Gilbert Gottfried prior to a stint as an impressionist at a dingy Gotham club; and spent 168 consecutive hours roller-blading, listening to rap music, wearing polyester loungewear, playing Myst, complaining about my parents, and being pointedly ironic in an effort to pass myself off as a member of Gen X.

But recently I noticed that everybody seems to be doing this sort of thing. First, Ben Cheever wrote a condescending book about being an upper-middle-class person who took crummy jobs at CompUSA just to see if he could crack the starting lineup as a member of the *hoi polloi*. Then Barbara Ehrenreich masqueraded as a factory worker, as if that was going to make anyone feel better. The reporter impersonating a dancer or bouncer or day trader is now a staple of the tabloids; the *New York Times* even has a guy named Harry Hurt III who writes a regular feature about attending clown school or learning the cello.

Concerned that the field was getting way too cluttered, and that younger writers poaching on my territory might one day put me out of work, I decided to up the ante in my own forays into stunt journalism. The first such undertaking was when I joined a veteran doo-wop group called The Coasters and filled in for backup singer Levi Perkins. Blessed with good pipes, and a reasonably competent dancer, I pulled this one off without a hitch, and while I'm not going to pretend that I would ever be confused with Sam Cooke or James Brown, I acquitted myself reasonably well.

While I was on tour, the bus driver for the group said that his brother-in-law ran a company that specialized in handling security for washed-up musicians. This led to the story "I Was A Bodyguard for Grand Funk Railroad" in *Rolling Stone*. While on tour with the men of funk, I fell in with an elderly gent at the Mohegan Sun Casino who asked if I would like to spend a month in the jungles of Colombia training as a Commu-

Joe Queenan is the author, most recently, of Closing Time: A Memoir.

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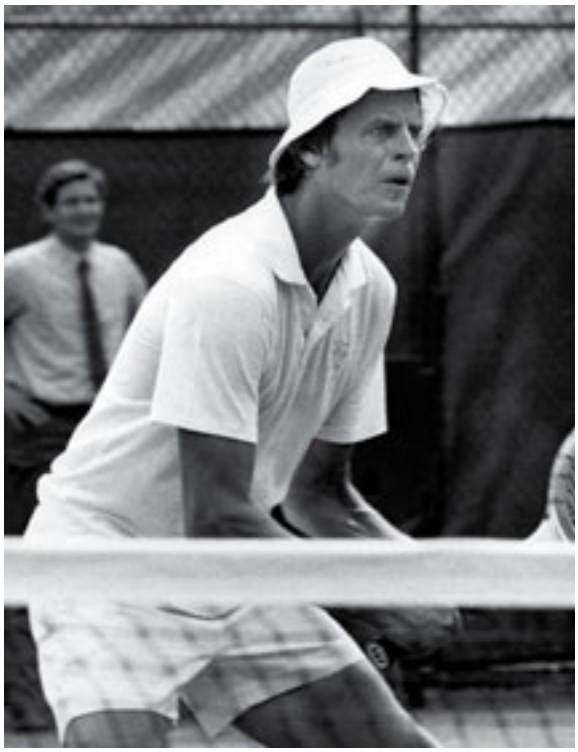
nist guerrilla with his cousin Esteban. He said that the guerrillas liked having journalists around, not only because their chipper stories would prove to the public that it wasn't all gloom and doom out there in the barrancas and arroyos, but also because it reassured kids that anyone could be a guerrilla. That was the most fun I ever had as a journalist, and while I won't go so far as to say that I would ever be confused with Ché Guevara or Comandante Zero, I'm no slouch when it comes to working a Kalashnikov or posing as an agrarian reformer and an implacable enemy of democracy. No slouch at all.

The stunt in Colombia led to one of my most successful ventures ever when a money-launderer in Bogota hooked me up with an IMF official in Zurich and I landed an assignment to work for a month at the federal reserve in Zimbabwe. Initially, President Mugabe's people only wanted to see if I could cut the mustard as an interest-rate forecaster. Like Plimpton, when he'd gotten smacked around good and proper years earlier at training camp with the Detroit Lions, I expected to get my head handed to me. But no, I turned out to be pretty darned good at the sub-Saharan rate-forecasting game, and even helped bring down the Zimbabwean inflation rate to around 130,000 percent a week when I suggested that the government stop printing money on Thursdays and periodically move the decimal point three places to the left.

"That way, you can keep the public guessing," I explained. I'm not saying that anyone would ever confuse me with John Maynard Keynes or Milton Friedman, but I certainly didn't make a fool of myself, either.

After I plugged my story on the *Colbert Report*, I was slated to spend a month training as a bag man for the *yakuza* and write a story about it for AARP under the title "Overseas Retirement Options." But then I got a call from the Treasury Department. Tim Geithner was really upset about the way his TARP program was being vilified by folks on the right and said that, provided I could guarantee major national exposure for my story, he would be willing to let me come down to Washington and work in his office for a month. That way, I could show the public that rescuing the global financial system wasn't a piece of cake, that it wasn't just a bunch of bozos from Dartmouth making all this stuff up on the spot.



George Plimpton, 1976

I'm not going to sit here and tell you that it was smooth sailing from the get-go. The first few days on the job I kept forgetting the difference between a run-of-the-mill credit swap and a reverse collateralized mortgage obligation—which really ticked off Larry Summers. "Get it straight, douche!" he snapped.

Let me tell you, *that* was a humbling experience. It was even worse when I admitted to Paul Volcker that I didn't know what BofA stood for, and couldn't entirely grasp the concept of "capital structure." Then one day it all clicked. Just like the time I'd taken the crash golf course at the Grand Cypress Resort for *GQ*, and managed to land on the green in two after triple-bogeying the first two holes. I had my eureka moment at Treasury when Geithner stopped by and asked if I was starting to learn the ropes. For whatever reason, I suggested that the major U.S. banks be subjected to a stress test, that the policy of marking toxic assets to market henceforth be abolished, as it was spooking the public, and that the government immediately take over General Motors.

"Forcing Wagoner to walk the plank would send a positive message to Main Street that you're serious about clearing up this mess," I said. "And if Citigroup doesn't get its act together, I'd ice that putz Pandit, too."

I'm not going to sit here and tell you that I knocked the ball out of the park every time during my brief stint at the Treasury. Heck, I was working with the best and the brightest; these people were scary-smart; they didn't need a knucklehead like me to tell them how to fix the economy. But because I'd spent so many years as a stunt journalist, I got the hang of things pretty quickly. Moreover, restructuring the American economy is a whole lot easier than posing as a bloodthirsty Maoist guerrilla. To tell you the truth, it's a whole lot easier than golf.

So in the end I didn't do so badly. True, I screwed up when I told the Chinese ambassador that if he wasn't happy with the dollar's recent performance, he could take his own jerkwater currency and stick it where the sun don't shine. And I probably could have come up with a better acronym than TARP if I'd really set my mind to it. But for the most part I did what I set out to do and I'm reasonably happy with the results. Geithner himself paid me the highest compliment when he told Barack Obama, "This guy picks things up so fast we should ship him to Pyongyang to negotiate with Kim Jong-Il."

But I know my limitations—and besides, I already had my next assignment lined up. *Maxim* is sending me out to the foothills of Pakistan to learn how to flog pint-sized teenaged girls. Luckily, it's the moderate wing of the Taliban I'll be working with out there. You know, the guys who can take a joke. ♦

RON GALELLA / WIREIMAGE

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B&A

She's the One

Kathryn Bigelow breaches the Hollywood treehouse.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Poor Barbra Streisand. Maybe you didn't know it, given how rich and famous and garlanded she is, but she is an abused victim—a victim of Hollywood. She directed a movie in 1991 called *The Prince of Tides*; it was nominated for an Academy Award but she was not, and the shock waves sent tremors from Provincetown to the Castro.

So it was meet and proper that La Streisand should have been the one to hand out the Best Direction statuette at the Oscars on March 2. And when she ripped open the envelope, she smiled and said "the time has come"—because a woman, Kathryn Bigelow of *The Hurt Locker*, had finally won an Oscar for directing a picture, a mere 83 years after the award was first given out.

The fact that Streisand was there to do the presenting suggests that the famously secret balloting for these prizes may not be quite as secret as all that. Something similar happened in 2003, when Kirk Douglas and his son Michael just happened to be on hand to present the Best Picture to *Chicago*, which just happened to feature Michael's wife, Catherine Zeta Jones. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences seemed to know that Bigelow was going to win, and wanted the most gratuitously snubbed female director in history to be the one to give her the trophy.

But there could be no director more different from Streisand than Kathryn Bigelow. She is an unusual "first woman" winner in that she triumphed with her work on a movie that, like her other pictures, bears no trace in its genetic code of having been directed by a person with two X chromosomes. *The Hurt Locker* is the most visceral combat movie made in the United States in this decade, and its sole female character of any import barely even gets a close-up.

Even more peculiar, while Bigelow did indeed do a smashing job of directing *The Hurt Locker*, it was an odd year of all years for her to win; the general view among moviemakers, moviegoers, and movie critics is that James Cameron achieved a breakthrough in his helming of *Avatar* that has fundamentally altered the course of cinema. (I don't agree with this assessment, but I seem to be the only person on the planet who doesn't.) Ordinarily that consensus would have been sufficient to win Cameron the Oscar for a movie he spent 10 years making, and for which he invented about a billion new technologies.

Kathryn Bigelow

DAN MACMEDAN / WIREIMAGE

But this was different. Bigelow and her movie benefited from the fact that one-fifth of all Academy voters are actors; they took one look at *Avatar* and saw the end of their profession right there on the screen before them, and they certainly weren't going to sing hosannas to the force driving them into obsolescence. So while Bigelow did kind of score a politicized affirmative action victory, it wasn't because she had broken through a barrier and deserved a special salute.

It was, rather, that she was singled out for attention that wasn't entirely deserved because her brand of small, intense, character-driven filmmaking, with splendid unknown actors burning brilliant holes in the screen, was deemed in need of a shot in the arm. These were Oscars that looked back with rueful nostalgia to cinema's golden past—and yes, horrifying though it is for us not-wanting-to-be-middle-aged people to think of it, the 1970s films that *The Hurt Locker* evokes are now three decades in the past—rather than gazing proudly into cinema's visionary future.

And you know what? It is, actually, a disgrace that it's taken 83 years for a woman to win an Oscar in directing. I say this with no irony. Wonderful, liberal, creative, noble, politically correct Hollywood really does have an almost hilariously retrogressive attitude toward female directors. There are exactly two—Nora Ephron and Nancy Meyers—with any serious box-office pedigree. Both are in their sixties, and both had to prove themselves as wildly successful writers before they could get a turn behind the camera.

Hollywood remains an industry governed by excess testosterone, in which studio executives, producers, and directors pride themselves on personal *Lord of the Flies*-like conduct—throwing paperweights at the heads of underlings, insisting on sex in exchange for bit parts, plagiarizing the work of others—that would have them cashiered in any line of business and have them permanently slammed in the brig if they came anywhere near an actual hurt locker. They don't have sensibilities; they have instincts, and their instincts tell them they should make boy movies and boys should direct those boy movies. They continue to run Hollywood because they were elevated to positions of people who behaved the same way themselves.

The destruction of that world by the centrifugal forces of new media cannot come soon enough, and band-aids like Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar are too little, too late. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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"To appreciate the sheer reach of the [Rahm] Emanuel legend, one need look no further than . . ."
—From "The Chief" by Noam Scheiber (**The New Republic**, *March 3, 2010*)

PARODY

and afterward. Lincoln's melancholy was especially pronounced in the fall of 1862, with the death of his eleven-year-old son Willie the previous February, and McClellan's failure to pursue Robert E. Lee's retreating army after the Battle of Antietam in September. So it was with a mixture of dread and curiosity that he received the dynamic congressman, Rahm Emanuel, in his White House sitting room that autumn afternoon.

Emanuel, like Lincoln, hailed from Illinois; but there the resemblance ended. Where Lincoln was reflective, Emanuel was vehement. When Lincoln sought to make a point, he would tell a frontier joke or story; by contrast, Emanuel would berate his listener, sometimes stabbing him in the chest or shoulder with the stump of his middle finger, mutilated in an accident in his father's blacksmith shop.

"I'm feeling like a skinned cat surrounded by mice," said Lincoln as the two prairie statesmen sat down in their Windsor rockers. "What shall I do, brother Emanuel?"

Emanuel stood and went straight to the point: "The first thing you should do, Mr. President, is get rid of that f—head McClellan and replace him with these two Western generals, Grant and Sherman, who are f—ing strangling the rebels in Vicksburg!"

Lincoln leaned forward: "Did you say to dismiss General McClellan?" he asked.

"G-d—mn right," replied Emanuel. "Fire his sorry ass! And when you've finished with him, extend this f—ing Emancipation Proclamation to all the states of the so-called Confederacy. That'll show those ass—les and their f—ing slaves you mean business!"

Lincoln stared at the ceiling and rubbed his chin, thinking aloud. "What you say makes sense," he murmured. "But General Axelrod insists that the Army of the Potomac would never accept

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